

A BLACK HARE PRESS ANTHOLOGY
DARK DRABBLÉS

NOM

NOM



compiled and edited by
MINIONS OF THE HELL HARE

A BLACK HARE PRESS ANTHOLOGY
DARK DRABBLES

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DARK DRABBLE ANTHOLOGIES

WORLDS

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MONSTERS

BEYOND

UNRAVEL

APOCALYPSE

LOVE

HATE

OCEANS

ANCIENTS

666

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Foreword

by The Black Hare Press Team

What do you fancy from our curiosity shop of scares?

Vampires, djinns, spirits, werewolves? Perhaps trolls, banshees, elves, mummies, or skeletons are your go-to thing? Carnivorous jack-o'-lanterns, evil-seeking clowns, Halloween purges, sexy-but-hungry succubi, genius loci scarecrows voraciously guarding their pumpkin patches, revenge of the Hallowe'en candies—whatever your particular penchant, you're sure to find something to satiate your appetite in here.

But don't worry, between 100-word gory bites, you'll have a moment to catch your breath before the next soul-eating creature climbs out of the grave...

Love & kisses

Black Hare Press



Squeak

by R. Wayne Gray

Squeak.

Leonard started, awake. Nance slept beside him, a sliver of moonlight stabbing through the blinds.

Squeak.

Leonard's breath caught. Just the rusting pipes complaining.

Squeak.

Where was it coming from? The front yard; the string of pumpkin lights brushing the peeling picket fence?

Squeak.

Definitely the hallway, outside the bedroom door. The heating kicking on to combat the October chill?

Squeak.

Or a rat, easing open the door with his nose?

Squeak.

No, it was just Leonard Jr on his tricycle, gliding across the floor...

Squeak.

...the moonlight reflecting off the little blue suit they had buried him in.

R. Wayne Gray is a Vermont based writer of horror and sci-fi. Twitter: [@RWayneGray](https://twitter.com/RWayneGray)



Petrify Me

by John A. McColley

Still as stone, I stand in the shadows of the tree, unable to follow the line of costumed classmates to the door. I know that witch; that crooked back and gnarled hands. I know the creatures that lurk in the shadows behind her when she opens the door to dole out “treats.”

By tonight, some of them—how many?—will feel their tummies rumbling, their skin dry. They’ll dream of candy and gingerbread. They’ll walk in their sleep, come to stand under another tree, or along the fence, and she’ll place them, pose them, before they finally wake as stone.

John A. McColley writes from his cave in New England. Come visit him at

www.patreon.com/JohnAMcColley



Heaven's Tears

by Christopher Wood

I t's been three days since it passed overhead, the night sky aglow with the burning detritus of the comet's twin tails.

I've barricaded my doors and windows, tried to tune out the screams.

I live alone. This may have saved me the horror of having to—

I WATCH THE CITY BURN.

The degeneration of humanity was swift. Days.

Intelligence, civility, cognisance, all reduced to nothing but the primeval Id. The satiation of primal urges. People have changed. Devolved. Physical abominashuns roaming the streets.

I havnt sleepd in days.

My hed herts. Im tyud.

Difikult to consentrayt.

Hungree. So very hungree.

Christopher Wood lives in the UK and writes speculative fiction. He is on Twitter [@chriswood01](#)



Pumpkin King

by David D. West

The pumpkin king kneeled in the desiccated field. Squash, carrots, and his own kin lay smashed, innards rotting in the hot fall air. He tightened his grip on his pitchfork.

A gaggle of humans laughed at the edge of the field, disappearing into the treeline, covered in stringy guts.

Year in and year out, they destroyed the fields. All the pumpkin princes and princesses murdered before they'd had a chance to thrive.

So be it. The pumpkin king would just have to get revenge his own way.

Tonight, their own princes and princesses would be walking the dark streets unattended.

*David D. West lives and teaches in the Pacific Northwest. Find him on Twitter/Instagram
[@DavidWestWrites](https://twitter.com/DavidWestWrites)*



Bad Treats by Gully Novaro

Dr Sevens always gives the worst treats for Halloween—sugar-free candy, fruit. She even gave us a dental care brochure once. Dentists are the worst neighbours.

I ring her doorbell anyway. Mom says it will hurt her feelings if I don't. When she opens the door with a bowl filled with full-sized candy bars, my jaw drops.

“I’m changing tactics this year.” She winks at me.

I leave her house, candy bar unwrapped before I’m out of her yard. I take a greedy bite. My teeth find something hard. I spit it out.

The candy is full of rotten teeth.

Gully Novaro is a non-binary writer from Argentina who loves dark tales. Twitter: [@GullyNovaro](https://twitter.com/GullyNovaro)



Trick-of-Teeth by John A. McColley

I left a little something for you on the porch. Just reach into the gargoyle's mouth to get it. Go on... The skeleton across the porch laughs. You jerk your hand back, leaving just a little scraping of flesh, a droplet of blood.

Quicker than your eye, a stone tongue flicks, accepting the sacrifice. I need more, but there are plenty of children behind you. Plenty of greedy little hands.

Oh yes, I see right through your disguises, but sometimes it's wiser to let them think you're fooled. After all, I don't need the whole child, not in this economy.

John A. McColley writes from his cave in New England. Come visit him at

www.patreon.com/JohnAMcColley



Saturation Dive

by Brett Mitchell Kent

Grainy sediment floats through the light of his headlamp, steady hum of his saw against pipe his only companion.

Oppressive darkness surrounds him, feeding his fragile mind a plague of nightmares.

Something rubs against his leg.

He tenses.

Taking hold of the lifeline, his only tether to the diving bell, he relaxes. *It's nothing.*

Again, on the other leg.

His pulse hammers in his ears.

Where is it?

He spins, line coiling around his waist.

Panic ensnares him, his scream garbled.

Radio silence.

His bellman, rigid with worry, reels the tether.

It returns, neatly severed by his saw, without him.



Horror writer Brett Mitchell Kent lives in northern Indiana with his husband and daughters.



Tricked by Nyki Blatchley

“**T**rick or treat!” shouted the tiny, red-faced demon as Mr Johnstone opened his door. Just the one. Well, one kid might do less damage on discovering he’d run out of candy.

“Oh, my, you’re scary,” he said, trying to put off the moment. “I bet you’re not as scary underneath your mask.”

“Course not,” said the demon with a giggle, and pulled it off to reveal a cute, impudent little girl’s face. “Are you afraid?”

“No, not now.”

“You should be.” And she pulled off the little girl mask, revealing the vast maw underneath that gaped to engulf Mr Johnstone.

Nyki Blatchley is a dragon disguised as a human, making a living as a copywriter. nykiblatchley.com



Candy

by Vijayaraj Mahendraraj

Dilated pupils studied the pale, writhing slug. Crooked fingers scooped it up.

“It will be alright, dear,” whispered the blind crone.

She began the unintelligible chants. Candles flickered incessantly in every room. The slug morphed in hand, pulsing blue, then black, then brown. It finally curled with those ungodly words, assuming the guise of a harmless toffee.

Knocks on the door were greeted with a wicked, wrinkled smile.

“Your hosts have come. Grow well again, my dears,” she whispered, adding the slug to a bag full of similar *toffees*.

The door creaked open.

“Trick-or-treat.”

“Welcome, children. Have your fill, dears.”

*Passionate writer. Published in Year Four DM Anthology and Grimdark Anthology with BHP.
Twitter: [@vijayaraj613](https://twitter.com/vijayaraj613)*



Hallóvín

by Andrew Anderson

Hannah felt ridiculous being the only one without a costume.

Sindri had invited the team to his Hallóvín party, which was apparently an Icelandic version of Halloween—but for boozy grown-ups. She had thought—hoped—that the costume element was optional.

Everyone was drunk when she arrived, costumed and scooping cupfuls from a punch bowl filled with a faintly luminous liquid.

Sindri noticed Hannah and shouted an announcement to the room.

“Hannah’s here, folks—as you know, she’s the fresh meat in the international department.”

Like the punch, the partygoers’ eyes glowed as they quickly formed a circle around her.

Andrew Anderson (he/him) is a writer of fiction from Bathgate, Scotland. Twitter: [@soorploom](https://twitter.com/soorploom)



Freak Out

by Dawn DeBaal

It was a joke. My brother Hal and I could always talk our cousin, Bobby, into stuff. We painted his face a bruised purple, pretending to “hang” him on the front porch.

The effect was great—little kids cried, running away.

We figured all the chocolate bars that didn’t get handed out were ours.

When Hal and I split up the booty at the end of the evening, we realised Bobby hadn’t said a word, staying in character.

“Bobby?” I touched him. He was cold.

Some kid had kicked the bucket he’d been standing on. We hadn’t noticed him choking.

Dawn DeBaal has over 500 published pieces to her credit and still wants more!
linktr.ee/dawndebral



Whispering Walls by Darlene Holt

Meandering through the mysterious manor, you follow the voices that led you there. The whispering walls guide you, lure you, calling out names of people you don't know. You wonder who they are, following the hypnotic croons down impossibly long corridors, oblivious to the decrepit portraits whose eyes wander as you pass. When the whispers start to sing your name, and the shadows stalk you through the halls, they lead you to a single door. You feel it vibrating with voices as you turn the knob and peek inside before the whispers turn to screams and pull you into darkness.

Darlene Holt is a writer, editor, and educator from California, where she enjoys writing horror stories.



Cool

by Kailey Alessi

Crisp air.

That's always what's struck Jack most about Halloween. How it snuck through the thin fabric of hand-me-down costumes, chilling him to the bone even as he insisted that he didn't need a jacket.

Tonight might be the last night he goes trick-or-treating, as he's almost thirteen and his friends are talking about how going door-to-door seeking candy isn't cool anymore.

Whatever.

Jack doesn't care, free candy is free candy. He strolls down the street by himself, pillowcase in hand and mask on his face.

He shivers in the cold air, oblivious to the dark figure trailing behind him.

Kailey Alessi is an anthropology graduate student by day, a dark fiction writer by night.



Baba Yaga by Leanbh Pearson

“Go to her hut.”

Her hut. The witch could be helpful, merciful, or terrible—but everyone knew she ate children. Stubbornly, I marched into the woods at the end of our street, twisted branches funnelling me towards a clearing.

A wooden hut, perched on spindly legs, surrounded by severed heads. I stared at a rotting head, open mouthed in a scream.

The door creaked like breaking bones.

I fled, twigs tearing at my cheeks, until I burst onto our empty street. Wild-eyed I frantically looked around. Behind me, *she* waited beneath the trees.

Baba Yaga smiled, showing metal teeth.

*Leanbh Pearson is an Australian LGBTQI dark fiction author. Twitter, Facebook & Instagram
[@leanbhpearson](#)*



Candy Apples by Bernardo Villela

Vampires can be made myriad ways. I cannot imagine why my brethren expend so much energy recruiting, outwitting, and draining new bloods. Not that I envy or disdain the cunning among our ranks, I am merely more practical and brutish than that.

Scores of children march to the door of my brooding abode annually, many devotees and servants waiting to be born.

“Trick or treat!” the first group exclaims. They choose among store-bought treats and homemade candy apples.

One boy smells the blood in the syrup and picks the apple. One bite and he’s a child of the night forever.

Bernardo Villela has short fiction included in many periodicals and anthologies. Published poetry and translations.



Curiosity Kills

by Warren Benedetto

On the first day, the cat brought me a mouse and laid it on my doorstep, teeth marks oozing through its dust-grey fur.

On the second day, the cat brought me a red-breasted robin and left it on my kitchen table, blood-splattered and broken-winged, next to my blueberry muffin.

On the third day, the cat brought me a rabbit and dropped it at my feet while I brushed my teeth, its innards oozing like cranberry sauce through a jagged gash in its belly.

Today, I woke up to the sound of a newborn baby crying.

I don't have a baby.

Warren Benedetto writes short fiction about horrible people doing horrible things.
www.warrenbenedetto.com



Pumpkin Head by Tim Law

I hated that boy—my brother, Jack. Hated him infinitely. Before he came and ruined my life, it was Ma, Pa, and me.

I squeezed him tight, kissed him goodnight, played with him constantly. But deep down I knew I wanted him dead; just needed opportunity.

Then Ma said, “Go fetch me a head.” I left with a nod and a smile.

With axe and knife and a desire for strife, Jack and I walked the mile.

Two of us went. One came back, bloody knife and heavy sack.

Now his eyes shine bright this Halloween night. Pumpkin Head Jack.

Tim keeps the tomes of darkness dust free, while simultaneously scrawling the muttering of devils.



Hunted by Lori Green

The moon fades into a thin veil of clouds, and the October chill sends a ripple of gooseflesh over Evie's pale skin. She should have stayed with the others, but she had wanted to show Jack that she wasn't afraid to enter the forest alone. Now, it is pitch black, and she stumbles blindly through the woods. The moon emerges from the shadows, and Evie's heart rejoices—until she looks upon the glowing orb in the sky. The moon stares back, stalking her every move as it morphs into the creature that stands before her, saliva dripping from its fangs.

Lori Green is a horror writer walking the fine line between macabre and madness. Twitter:
[@LoriG1408](https://twitter.com/LoriG1408)



Apple Bobbing by John A. McColley

Welcome to the orchard! Pick away! Did you know the roots of this tree reach past that low stone wall over there? Into the pits dug long ago, tapping into soil turned by worms for a century, bone shards broken by time... Except for one body. It's still as plump and red-cheeked as the day it was interred. Just like those fruits over your head, I wait, ripen, grow.

I, my awareness, have moved through root and stem, slowly, as the tree grows. Take some apples, fill the tub with water, try to bite them. They won't bite back... Promise.

John A. McColley writes from his cave in New England. Come visit him at

www.patreon.com/JohnAMcColley



Third Place by Hillary Lyon

“Just once,” Eula growled, “I’d like to win first prize in this club’s Halloween costume contest.”

Eleanor patted her disgruntled companion’s shoulder. “I know, but—”

“Look at me!” Eula wailed. She motioned to her burial frock, her dry hair, her dirty nails, the thick mortuary make-up on her face. “I am authentic! I’m not wearing some cheap party-supply store get-up.”

“I know,” Eleanor commiserated, “but the judges want pop culture’s version —”

“Pop culture be damned!” Eula spat.

Eleanor shrugged. “Eula, honey, they want sexy zombies.”

“But I was sexy,” Eula whimpered. “In my day.”

“Yeah,” Eleanor sighed. “In 1922.”

Since childhood, Hillary Lyon has enjoyed all things speculative and spooky; her writing illustrates this affinity. hillarylyon.wordpress.com



Halloween Breakup by Phillip Pettit

After the latest miscarriage, our doctor confirmed it—the explanation came like a gut punch. We could never have kids.

Back home, I closed the door softly. We held each other in the entranceway.

Moments later, there was a knock and calls of “Trick or treat?” Two little ghosts smiled with sad, painted faces.

All evening, kids knocked; heart-wrenching past reminders.

Macy was morose. “There’s no reason for ‘us’ then.”

Another knock. This time a little grim reaper; oddly familiar, with Macy’s eyes and my nose.

Another who bled a river from its mouth, dissolving into past memory’s toxic flow.

Phillip Pettit lives in Perth, Western Australia and enjoys reading and writing short fiction.



Halloween Treat

by Sophie Wagner

The Masons told Andy that there was only one rule for babysitting she needed to follow: put the candy bowl outside, no matter what. She had promised them she would, but by the end of the night, it had left her mind completely.

She was so utterly exhausted, she slept through the gentle knocks that turned into violent bangs on the door. But when the window exploded inwards, she awoke, screaming, as she fell to the floor.

Princesses, robots, and ninjas hurtled over furniture towards her, baying for candy and blood.

Then they descended upon her—their makeshift Halloween treat.

Sophie Wagner is an up-and-coming author with publications from The Macabre Ladies and Iron Faerie!



Friend Indeed by Elton Skelter

There's only so much you can flush down the toilet before you foul the plumbing. Debbie knew that better than anyone. When that smell started radiating from downstairs, Debbie knew from the first whiff what was going on in apartment 3B. She'd had the same issue many times over, one for each husband. Rest their souls.

It's about being neighbourly and nothing says *being a good neighbour* than helping a friend unclog human fat from their pipes.

Now they're the best of friends, and it's like Debbie always says: it helps if your friends owe a favour here and there.

Elton Skelter is a horror author currently published by *Dark Matter Ink* and *D&T Publishing*. Twitter: [@elton_skelter](https://twitter.com/elton_skelter)



I Take

by Rebecca Cuthbert

The kiddies don't know that when I give to them, I take for myself—a little of their essence, their energy, traded for measly chocolate bars.

I drink in their shining eyes behind skull masks and grease paint. When they say “Trick or treat!” I swallow puffs of their lolly-scented breath, sweet as it glides across my tongue and down my throat, into my lungs, my bloodstream.

Beneath the sugar buzz, can they feel their bones soften just a bit? Do they notice they're shorter, lighter. And tired, so tired?

I become more beautiful every time I open the door.

Rebecca Cuthbert writes speculative, slipstream, and dark fiction and poetry. Publications and more at rebeccacuthbert.com.



Pain Free

by Corinne Pollard

Breathing is impossible, even if my threaded lips weren't sealed flat against my ball of a head. My right button eyelid perceives spots, while my left dangles uselessly by its fibres. Pins press my patchy skin fragments together, just barely. Black gaps open as my limbs attempt basic walking—the stitches wore out ages ago.

I stumble closer to Master's dwelling, ignoring the human children who compliment me on "such a sick costume." I miss Master's stabbings with his needles. I miss that curling twist on his lips as he jabs my cotton torso.

Why did he throw me away?

Corinne is a UK disabled horror writer published in Sirens Call and Trembling with Fear. Twitter: [@CorinnePWriter](https://twitter.com/CorinnePWriter)



Killer Clowns

by Wondra Vanian

Something moved in the cornfield. Michelle did a double take, tugging her friend's sleeve.

"Did you see that?"

Evie elbowed her in the ribs.

"Shut up!"

Michelle squinted into the darkness. "I'm sure—"

"Shut *up*! Here they come..."

A group of schoolkids turned down the corn maze, chattering nervously after their last fright.

Evie laughed maniacally, waving her plastic machete. The kids screamed.

And kept screaming.

Strange. This is where they usually start giggling...

Turning slowly, Evie found herself face-to-face with a *real* homicidal clown. And, at the feet, wearing too-large shoes, was her best friend, Michelle's, severed head.

Wondra Vanian lives in the UK with her partner and their mischief of sausage dogs.



Dreadwood

by Vijayaraj Mahendraraj

They ignore the tangible darkness of midnight. They ignore our creaks.
They ignore our unwelcoming whispers.

The young, the youthful. Arrogance. Entitlement. Wastefulness. As we creep closer, barks and boughs aplenty, we glimpse their indifference.

Loud. Bitter. Rash. They burn us for their campfires. They drink, litter, and excrete in our home. They celebrate away from the watchful eyes of more learned elders, whose warnings of the woods clearly fell on deaf ears.

Alas, tonight is Halloween. And as they sit about their fires, telling frightful tales while igniting our brethren, we will rip them all from root and stem.

*Passionate writer. Published in Year Four DM Anthology and Grimdark Anthology with BHP.
Twitter: [@vijayaraj613](https://twitter.com/vijayaraj613)*



Knock, Knock by Andrew Anderson

Morna sprinted ahead, boasting that she wasn't scared to knock on Old McGraw's door. We were all too full of chocolate to keep up with her, so she disappeared around the corner.

She wasn't being that brave, as Old McGraw has been dead for four years, so he wasn't expected to answer; the house is also abandoned.

Then we heard Morna scream, and a door slammed shut.

When we arrived at the house, her shoe buckle was hanging from the door handle. I volunteered to go in to find her, but the place was empty.

We never saw Morna again.

Andrew Anderson (he/him) is a writer of fiction from Bathgate, Scotland. Twitter: [@soorploom](https://twitter.com/soorploom)



Hard Work by Keith R. Burdon

Lighting a candle, she placed it in the hollowed recess. The flame cast dancing shadows on the walls and ceiling. She smiled at her handiwork—it was perfect.

She had spent hours working, perfecting her design. She'd been surprised just how sharp the knife needed to be, eventually switching to one with a serrated edge.

Having scooped out the insides, she left them scattered in the garden for the wildlife. She supposed she should have made something with them, but she hated cooking.

She could have used a pumpkin, but why bother when the real thing looked so much better?

Keith R. Burdon enjoys writing and eating cake, but not necessarily in that particular order.



Shadow Cat

by Laura Nettles

A black cat sat on the porch, watching Trick-o-Treaters pass. None dared to approach the supposedly haunted house.

The cat's tail twitched. If children would not come to them, they would go to the children. Inky darkness writhed, then stretched beneath the feline, slithering towards the street. Towards dinner.

Shrill screeches of costumed kids turned to screams of terror as shadows shackled small human ankles, dragging them towards the dilapidated house. Soft hands scrabbled for purchase, nails eroding past the quick as they ground on the sidewalk and driveway.

Jaw distended. Screams cut short. The shadows eased back, satiated.

Purr.

Laura Nettles pens terror by moonlight in Toronto, Canada. Follow her journey at lauranettles.com.



Halloween Night

by Darlene Holt

I just bought an old Victorian house. Supposedly, the original owner murdered a dozen trick-or-treaters on Halloween night decades ago.

Neighbourhood's nice, though. Julie even met some twins and is going trick-or-treating with them and their mother.

I go next door to introduce myself, but no one answers. A silhouette passes a curtain upstairs. Julie says she's shy. They're leaving soon, but I have work and can't see them off.

I call Julie from work. No answer.

Curious about the next-door neighbour, I call our realtor.

"Next door? No one's lived there since that crazy woman murdered those poor twins."

Darlene Holt is a writer, editor, and educator from California, where she enjoys writing horror stories.



Night Air by Dorian J. Sinnott

Mama warned us to draw the curtains at the first breath of autumn. The days were shorter—shadows thicker. She swore that in late October the Devil roamed up and down the mountainside at the first touch of twilight.

We cowered beneath windowsills, terrified of what lurked behind the glass, knowing that he was out there somewhere. Watching. Waiting.

That's when Mama started letting in the village priest shortly after dusk, to pray the evil spirits away.

Yet, we always found our fear strongest when we looked into his eyes—yellow, hollow. Holding the night air heavy in their gaze.

Dorian J. Sinnott's work has appeared in 200+ publications and been nominated for numerous awards. www.doriansinnott.com



Sex Game by Corinne Pollard

Granny Smiths nod at me with instructions tied at their stalks. Their star-shaped bottoms glisten with beads.

My racy nurse costume bows, shuffling with handcuffed wrists behind my back.

My husband, the game genius, leers.

At a blinded angle, my lips wrap around one. My teeth pounce, but the layer of green skin fails to pierce. Too solid. Too frozen. Each tooth cracks, squirting blood, disintegrating like rock erosion falling into my saliva lake.

I palpitate as the ice floods my gums while spitting each incisor, canine, premolar, and molar out.

He laughs and rants about fidelity and liquid nitrogen.

Corinne is a UK disabled horror writer published in Sirens Call and Trembling with Fear. Twitter: [@CorinnePWriter](https://twitter.com/CorinnePWriter)



True Skin by Ron Fein

Hidden behind a thorny hedge, Connor watched the young woman come ashore. She stripped off her wetsuit, hung it up to dry, then lay naked in the sun.

As she slept, Connor snatched her suit, locking it in a metal box buried in the sandy soil.

When she arose, Connor spoke. “I’ve taken your true skin, selkie. Stay ashore and marry me.”

“Och, poor lad,” she soothed. “You’ve misjudged. I’m no selkie.”

Connor frowned. “A regular woman?”

She grinned.

Red shadows blotted out the sun.

“You wish,” she said, opening her maw. A thousand glittering fangs sunk into his throat.

Ron Fein lives near Boston. Find him at ronfein.com.



Exorcism Surprise by Kathryn Reilly

The exorcist stood in shocked silence. It was the first instance in the church's recorded history that a demon had stayed to be a pet. Horrified, Father Thomas witnessed black wisps leave the girl, transforming into something between a hellhound and a decomposing wyvern twice her size. He watched the child's colour return, nails recede, and lank, goo-saturated hair transform to golden ringlets. Turning her gaze to him, she slowly petted the creature which rumbled in delight.

Father Thomas backed away, one hand on his cross, the other feeling for the door.

“She’s hungry, Father, and you look well fed.”

Kathryn Reilly's speculative tales resurrect goddesses and ghosts; her rescue mutts hear the stories first. [@Katecanwrite](#)



Candy Necklace by W. Ed George

Tart Halloween choker, bangles of milky chocolate Smarties, rock candy rings glistening like diamonds, Fun Dip powder dusting your unblemished face.

Cold adornments befitting my Ice Queen— NO! Mustn't speak ill of the dead.

So irresistible in funeral attire, I climb in beside you, ravenous: pulse masking canned organ music; arousal musk overpowering the formaldehyde flooding your veins.

I climb in beside you and taste.

To renew a love bond forged true. Youthful, reckless, *unnatural*. Alas, doomed.

I lick every accessory, nibble flesh below hemlines and under cuffs. Careful to preserve your saccharine beauty for burial.

My signature farewell.

W. Ed George is a recovering journalist who resides in a haunted house in Central California.



Share

by Sophie Wagner

“Please?” Lyla whined as she dragged Carson through the darkened night.

He pinched the bridge of his nose in frustration, fuming silently. It was past her bedtime, his even, but she insisted on visiting her friends who she wanted to split her treats with. As if that couldn’t wait....

“Fine,” he muttered, already being pulled towards the last house on the block. The outside was ripe with rot, but even worse was the stick-like figures that crawled and skittered within the shadows of the house.

“I told you I would share.” Lyla smiled into the darkness. The darkness smiled back.

Sophie Wagner is an up-and-coming author with publications from The Macabre Ladies and Iron Faerie!



Hatman

by Chelsea Pumpkins

I met the Hatman in my bedroom. I knew it was a dream. The darkness of his void stripped me down. *Just a dream, just a dream.* He'd come again from time to time, lurk in the shadows of the window blinds and wait.

I saw the Hatman in the shower. I knew something was wrong. It's not a dream. I'm not asleep. It's not where he belongs. Steam cascades around his silhouette, water dripping from his brim. In a breath, he's gone. And I'm left. Waiting.

I found the Hatman in the mirror, but now he has my eyes.

Read Chelsea Pumpkins' stories in anthologies Chromophobia and Bloodless, and follow her on Twitter [@ChelseaPumpkins](https://twitter.com/ChelseaPumpkins).



Music Hater

by Andy Clark

The skeleton hung from the door, dangling from a nail, bones clattering with the wind, swaying like a sickle in wheat. As the night of ghosts arrived, fingers and legs fell into a beat, almost a song, a beat reminiscent of horses drawing a coffin cart. Yet children still passed by, checking the house for Halloween plunder. Then the moan escaped the mouth, somehow fleeing a tongue-less jawbone, the bone hanging open as the voice released into the air, sending passing children away in panic. What did this voice say that was so awful? “Please, not the ‘Monster Mash’ again!”

Andy Clark lives in Richmond with his wife, son, grand-dachshund and is a moderator for fantasy-writers.org.



Abandoned House

by Nancy Pica Renken

A passerby paused, staring for a moment at the lopsided jeering face, and the sombre porch with its warped floorboards and dangling lightbulb, all framed by jagged shrub. No birds roosted in the trees. No crickets chirped. No other soul came near this All Hallows' Eve. The naked bulb and the flaring tea light were the sole signs of life...

AROUND TOWN THE NEXT day, notices papered poles surrounded by well-manicured lawns.

Missing: Dog

Missing: Parakeet

Missing: Cat

Missing: Toddler

In the shade, the jack-o'-lantern rested, tea light flickering, animating the hollowed cavity, a trickle of blood escaping its mouth.

Nancy Pica Renken, a short story and flash fiction writer, can be found at
<https://www.nancyprenken.com/>



The Saint **by Roan Dorn**

Lights and laughter. Trick or treat. Halloween. All Hallows' Eve. Has it crossed your thoughtless minds how you become one? The walls are thin tonight. With broken strides, soundlessly I cross. Too-long limbs, aching joints, I walk your streets. Song and play, sticky-sweet life. I was murdered. How dare you celebrate?

You feel safe. Werewolves, vampires, ghosts...none of the fallen can enter holy ground. Your homes are sacred: you understand that in your hearts. You're not afraid. For centuries you've been lauding my violent death, safe in your sacred homes. But I am here tonight. And I. Am. Hallowed.

Roan Dorn writes everywhere—on horseback, on the balcony, while his students take their tests...



Judgement

by Brianna Witte

I pushed those ugly thoughts out of my head—the ones of my wife’s limp body at the bottom of the stairs, and the millions of dollars I paid to make all accusations go away.

I could feel the veil between the dead and living loosen. All Hallows’ Eve, bringing her anger closer to me.

I couldn’t run. I helplessly sat on the bed, a bat held tightly in my hands. A few more hours and this nightmare would be over.

Cold, decaying arms wrapped around me, and my wife’s foetid breath whispered in my ear.

“I’m just getting started.”

*Brianna Witte is the author of “Witches and Vampires” a fast-paced, fantasy adventure novella.
Instagram: [@briannawitteauthor](https://www.instagram.com/briannawitteauthor)*



Payback by Pauline Yates

Tired of being turned into a useless Halloween decoration, I snake my vine around the farmer's ankle and drop him to the ground. The sympathetic scarecrow bends forwards, snatches the farmer's machete in his straw-filled gloves, and cuts off the farmer's head. Eager to avenge their poisoned mates, rats eat out the farmer's eyes, then crawl through the eye sockets and hollow out the skull. They exit through the farmer's mouth, their sharp teeth tearing chunks from his lips, leaving a gruesome jagged line. The result is a much better decoration for this year's festivities—confirmed by his wife's screams.

Pauline Yates lives in Queensland, Australia. She writes dark stories and loves bright sunrises.

linktr.ee/paulineyates



Trick-or-Treat by Vijayaraj Mahendraraj

“Nice mask, nerd!”

Donnie chucked it down, stomping repeatedly. “Better like this.”

Muddy boots crushed the ruined masks as he skipped away, chuckling, with a fistful of candy. Bruised children were left teary-eyed.

As midnight neared, he glimpsed a solitary child under a streetlamp.

“You lost?”

He stared. His mask was leathery, zombie-like with flaking skin of black and brown. Donnie could not resist. He grabbed at the mask, mockingly.

It was no mask.

He crumpled screaming, hand blistering. A claw-like appendage slithered for his agonised visage.

Donnie heard a final raspy whisper before his flesh burned. “Nice mask, nerd.”

Passionate writer. Published in Year Four DM Anthology and Grimdark Anthology with BHP.

Twitter: [@vijayaraj613](https://twitter.com/vijayaraj613)



Pine Taste

by Addison Smith

Wood splinters between my jaws, tiny fibrous shards biting into gum and cheek and tongue. The sap-sodden tang of pine caresses my taste buds, and the blood that joins it is sweetest sugar. Marionette eyes stare unseeing as I chew their puppet flesh and dance on strings not my own, acting out the urges of another.

Mother watches, clearly pleased by my meal. The marionettes are only the newest visitors, not loved the way she loves me, her first and finest creation. “Eat well,” she says as I bite into unrelenting wood until my teeth press hard into my gums.

Addison Smith is a writer of speculative fiction. You can find him on Twitter [@AddisonCSmith](https://twitter.com/AddisonCSmith).



Darkest Dream by Kelly Matsuura

It's a costume, I say to myself. *Just a stupid Halloween costume.*
In wearing it to the block party, I'll have my photo taken in it, and then I'll take it off.

Probably.

As I cross the neighbourhood, I feel it stirring.

No, not *it*. Me. I feel *me* inside, ready to come out. This suit with alum claws, synthetic skin, and black folded wings makes my darkest dream come alive. I'm reborn.

I turn the corner and spot the perfect victim—my ex, Georgios. As I tear wildly at his chest and face, he screams in pure terror.

“Harpy!”

Kelly Matsuura writes horror, fantasy, and literary fiction. She's the Creator/EIC of Insignia Stories.
www.blackwingsandwhitepaper.com



Shoebox by Chelsea Pumpkins

I stole my sister's shoebox—the one with glossy white walls and clean, crisp corners.

Its purity compelled me.

I cut a hole into its side, stuffed it full of tissues and crammed in my misdeeds.

It's where my impish secrets dwell, nestled in with fiendish spiders.

Wicked cravings, poisoned thirst.

A casket packed with sin.

Crusted cobwebs lace the lining and emit a potent tang from the shadows of my closet.

The lid's locked tight to keep them in, but every now and then, I peer inside the hole and smile at the monsters I shoved into the cave.

Read Chelsea Pumpkins' stories in anthologies [Chromophobia](#) and [Bloodless](#), and follow her on Twitter [@ChelseaPumpkins](#).



Sickly Sweets

by John A. McColley

A week before Halloween, a new candy store opened. They advertised everything as handmade, specialising in “scary” candy: liquorice bats and chalky skeletons in cardboard caskets.

Everyone in town visited, stocking up for the holiday. While the spiders and snakes ran low, more grotesqueries appeared—fruity severed hands, heads, too realistic eyeballs...

Kids went missing, then adults. There was never a sign of struggle or entry, just bags from the Candied Corpse, a few stray drops of red syrup. The cops never made arrests. It was too absurd, but three new Candied Corpses opened in nearby towns the next season.

John A. McColley writes from his cave in New England. Come visit him at

www.patreon.com/JohnAMcColley



Blindly Carving by Addison Smith

“This is hard!” Jolene said, but there was laughter on her lips. “I can’t tell what I’m doing.”

“You’re doing great.” She felt Paul’s smile, even behind her blindfold. She worshiped that smile, coy and misunderstood. She pushed the knife into the pumpkin. She kept the carving; simple, with triangle eyes and a crescent mouth. Pumpkin juice dripped down her fingers, but she couldn’t know where she was cutting. She hoped the eyes were above the mouth.

“Am I done?” she asked, “How does it look?”

Paul didn’t answer. She lifted the blindfold and inspected her work.

Then she screamed.

Addison Smith is a writer of speculative fiction. You can find him on Twitter [@AddisonCSmith](https://twitter.com/AddisonCSmith).



Bully Gum

by Kai Delmas

Every year you snivelling brats come to my door and shout. It's treats you want and threats you make.

It's tradition, one might say.

Well, I'm no big fan of traditions.

It's time for a change, and I've been prepping all year. The treats I have in store for you are one of a kind.

Remember that Dawson boy who was bullying every elementary kid on the block? Haven't seen him around for a while, have you?

Bully Gum. That's what I have for you little kiddos.

So I ask you, my lovelies, what will it be? Trick? Or treat?

Kai Delmas loves creating worlds, magic systems, and drabbles. Find him on Twitter [@KaiDelmas](#).



Attic Girl

by Leanbh Pearson

No one went trick or treating to the house at the end of the street. The wrought iron fence and gate were rusted with age, the front path overgrown with weeds. The house itself leaned like the bent spine of an old man. Paint peeled back like fragile skin to reveal the bones of the building beneath.

But it wasn't the dilapidated house with the "Demolition site" sign that caused the children to avoid it. It was the girl who stood at the attic window watching them. Pale and incorporeal, with haunted eyes. An impossible girl who couldn't be there.

*Leanbh Pearson is an Australian LGBTQI dark fiction author. Twitter, Facebook & Instagram
[@leanbhpearson](#)*



Mrs Nagalot by Pauline Yates

“Ninety-seven. Ninety-eight. Ninety-nine.” Harold sighs. “One short.”

“I told you we should have planted corn,” Martha says. “But, no—you had to sign a contract to supply one hundred pumpkin heads for the council’s Halloween festival. You never listen to me. Always have to do it your way. You know what the council’s like. If you don’t fill the quota, they’ll go elsewhere. Why I ever thought to marry a stubborn man is beyond me. You’ll ruin us, that’s what—”

Harry swings the machete, cutting off Martha’s head.

“One hundred,” he says. “I know how to fill a quota.”

Pauline Yates lives in Queensland, Australia. She writes dark stories and loves bright sunrises.
linktr.ee/paulineyates



Lethal Dose

by David D. West

The usual pre-Halloween news report ran, warning parents of poison-laced candy.

“Who would do such a thing?” Charlotte asked. She sat at her kitchen table, a bowl of candy before her, awaiting the neighbourhood children.

Annabelle, her cat, meowed a response and sauntered away, leaving strands of white hair floating in the air.

“Exactly. Only a monster would do something vile like that.” Charlotte cackled and moved to the sink, where she retrieved her hidden instruments.

She plunged the needle into each fun-sized candy bar, injecting it with her lethal concoction.

The doorbell rang, followed by the chorus of “Trick-or-treat!”

*David D. West lives and teaches in the Pacific Northwest. Find him on Twitter/Instagram
[@DavidWestWrites](#)*



Slime Trail

by Maggie D. Brace

Giving a derisive kick to the gape-faced pumpkin, Lyle staggered to the hammock and ensconced himself in it for his annual vigil—staving off pranks from the local miscreants. No egging was going to take place on his watch!

The gentle swaying soon eased him into a deep slumber so he was unaware of the handful of snails he'd dislodged out of the pumpkin, slowly making their way up his leg.

Their multitude of sharpened teeth systematically carved sinuous trails into his flesh. As he slowly bled out, he was mistaken for a Halloween prop.

Egging was the final indignity.

Maggie D. Brace has multiple short works, poems and artwork in various anthologies.

[@maggiedbrace](https://twitter.com/maggiedbrace)



Halloween Decorations by Gully Novaro

My neighbour goes all out for Halloween: pumpkins, monsters, skeletons, bodies hanging from trees. This year he's dug an open grave.

I can take the crass decorations, but that pit is dangerous, and I won't stand for it. I ring his doorbell and let him have it.

He agrees. He already has the dirt ready, he says. If I give him a hand, we can cover it right now.

We reach the grave and he pushes me in. He pushes the mound of dirt over on top of me.

"It works every year," I hear him say before I'm buried.

Gully Novaro is a non-binary writer from Argentina who loves dark tales. Twitter: [@GullyNovaro](https://twitter.com/GullyNovaro)



Bête Noire

by Michael J. Stiehl

“**T**rick or treat!” said the girl, and Ellie Grey imagined foam gurgling through her teeth. Pictured her brightly painted skin pale and blue.

“You’re cute,” Ellie replied, tightening her sweaty, arthritic grip on the candy dish.

Ellie dropped miniature candy bars and liquorice into the girl’s plastic sunset-coloured pumpkin and tried not to leer. As they collided with half a hundred other polypropylene wrappers, she felt an excited shiver run up her spine.

“Aren’t you wondering what I am?” said the girl, with a rhinestone smile.

Ellie didn’t.

She only wondered if anyone would notice the wrappers’ irregularly resealed edges.

Michael J. Stiehl lives in Chicagoland where he reads, rides bikes, and obsesses about music.

[@michael.stiehl](https://twitter.com/michael.stiehl)



Orange Soup by Tim Law

B*est in the business.* That's what they called me. You want roaches gone, rats, mice? You call Bob—I'll get the job done.

I'm a whizz in the kitchen too. Especially around Halloween: best pumpkin pie; thick and creamy soup. I used to make it for my local church for their homeless drive.

First year, they were suspicious. Next, friendly. By year three, they slurped up my soup like it was liquid gold. To wipe out vermin, make them trust you first.

Now I'm three years in on a ten-year sentence. The kitchen's mine, and the soup's on the stove.

Tim keeps the tomes of darkness dust free, while simultaneously scrawling the muttering of devils.



Hellbound

by Elton Skelter

The emissary puts one hand on my shoulder and squeezes. “Don’t cry,” he says, in an almost sympathetic voice. The skin of his fingers smells like charcoal briquettes, like bad eggs. “You always knew it’d end this way.”

I take my first step down. The soles of my shoes are melting in the heat, my eyes sting as my lashes burn away. I have to force myself to keep walking down the staircase and into the flames.

The emissary is right, of course. I always knew I’d end up down here eventually.

I just didn’t know I’d be this scared.

*Elton Skelter is a horror author currently published by Dark Matter Ink and D&T Publishing.
Twitter: [@elton_skelter](https://twitter.com/elton_skelter)*



The Angel

by Warren Benedetto

“Want some, Daddy?” Jeff’s daughter held the can out to him. It was their last.

“No, baby. You finish.”

The girl spooned another slice of peach into her mouth. Dribbles of sweet juice cut clean streaks down her filthy chin. “Daddy?”

“Yes?”

“Will you be sad when I die?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

Jeff glanced at the festering black bite mark on her arm. The infection was spreading. “Because you’ll come back.”

“Like Mommy did? As a monster?”

“Not a monster. An angel.”

“And you’ll still love me?”

Jeff nodded, then tightened his grip on the gun in his pocket. “Always.”

Warren Benedetto writes short fiction about horrible people doing horrible things.
www.warrenbenedetto.com



Take One by Grant Butler

Since I was recovering from a broken ankle, I couldn't answer the door for trick-or-treaters. But, as I didn't want anyone to miss out, I put out a candy bowl with a "Please take one" sign.

My duplex neighbour, Laura, just rolled her eyes, like she always does about trick-or-treating, but I didn't care.

So on Halloween night, I watched scary movies and fell asleep on the couch.

I woke up to the sound of knocking at the door. It was the police, who wanted to ask me some questions because Laura had left last night and never returned home.

Grant Butler is the author of the novel The Heroin Heiress and other short stories.



Pepto-Bismol Halloween

by Margarida Brei

Midnight screams, a kaleidoscope of blood, rotting smells, and maggotty foods were the horrors of Halloween that possessed me. Instead, Mother dressed me as a princess. Not just any princess—Princess Barbie. I felt like dying in a vat of Pepto-Bismol! *May your reign of Barbie terror come back to haunt you in vomiting pink, Mother!*

Some hooligan tricksters taunted me, jeering, “Is that a pig, or a porky Barbie?”

I had my revenge by cursing their bag of treats with a chalky Pepto-Bismol taste. It felt good to have magic at the tip of my trotters— I mean fingers.

Margarida Brei struggles with misbehaving characters, disappearing protagonists, and dark drabbles becoming romance comedies.



Shopping List by Addison Smith

The list was taped to the door frame, but nobody ever read it. It was a chance at salvation from their wicked ways, but the children were too intent on their prize, the adults too trusting in their neighbours. It consisted of only three items, a check mark next to each. Chocolate. Apples. Rat Poison. A child dressed as a zombie smiled up at the homeowner. “Trick or treat!” he said with a gap-toothed grin. He reached out for his chocolate prize.

“Happy Halloween!” the homeowner said and handed it over. “Try not to eat it all at once now.”

Addison Smith is a writer of speculative fiction. You can find him on Twitter [@AddisonCSmith](https://twitter.com/AddisonCSmith).



Typewriter by Vijayaraj Mahendraraj

Clunky keys, a faded ink roll. A forgotten remnant before Drew found it. His mother disapproved of him preferring antiques to companions.

One night, Drew heard typing. No one. Just the typewriter imprinting vague ominous words.

Under floorboards.

Drew spotted loose panels, stumbling upon much wealth.

Many more occurrences followed. It was always right.

Drew coveted it and obeyed, cleaning the keys and restoring the ink roll. He obsessively waited for more instructions.

On Halloween night, his mother'd had enough. Intent on its disposal, she crept into his room. She found a tear-soaked crumpled parchment with two words.

Kill her.

*Passionate writer. Published in Year Four DM Anthology and Grimdark Anthology with BHP.
Twitter: [@vijayaraj613](https://twitter.com/vijayaraj613)*



Under Leaves

by Warren Benedetto

“Let’s play zombies,” I told my sister.

I instructed Kelsey to bury me under the pile of autumn leaves our father raked together in the yard. Once I was covered, I waited a moment...then burst out of the pile with a monstrous growl. Kelsey squealed with delight.

“My turn!” she shouted. “Do me!”

Kelsey giggled as I covered her with leaves.

Then, silence.

I waited.

Ten seconds.

Twenty.

Thirty.

“Kelsey?” No answer. “Kelsey, come out!”

Nothing.

I swept the leaves away from where I had buried her. I found her shoes. Her clothes. Her jacket.

But Kelsey was gone.



Warren Benedetto writes short fiction about horrible people doing horrible things.

www.warrenbenedetto.com



The Barrier

by Bernardo Villela

The barrier between the worlds of the living and the dead is thinnest on Halloween. It was just an empty saying I'd thought, until Leon said we should go trick-or-treating at the nearest graveyard.

"I'm supposed to knock on it?"

"Yeah."

"And what do we get?"

"Who knows? That's the fun."

Leon was so serious, like he really believed it. "Come on, Tommy."

Calling his bluff, I knocked on the headstone above the name.

Nothing.

"You forgot something," Leon advised.

It struck me.

I knocked again.

"Trick or treat."

My ankles were grabbed.

Tibias cracked.

I collapsed into the earth.

Bernardo Villela has short fiction included in many periodicals and anthologies. Published poetry and translations.



Birthday Girl

by Blaise Langlois

Having a birthday on Halloween should be fun—that is unless you aren't allowed to go trick-or-treating. This year is going to be different.

The locks are much easier to remove than I anticipate, and I slip quietly into the night.

I reach the first house and gently knock on the door. A woman dressed in crimson opens it. She looks expectant, as if there's something I should be saying.

I clear my throat and shyly mutter, "You look delicious." She opens her mouth to scream, revealing her beautiful teeth.

I return the gesture and show her my fangs.

Author and poet, Blaise Langlois, never turns down the chance to tell a spooky story.

<https://ravenfictionca.wordpress.com/>



Making Memories **by Keith R. Burdon**

“**T**rick or treat!” the voices chorused.

“Well, aren’t you little guys just the cutest? Let’s see who we’ve got here? Is that Batman? And a ghost! Oooh, and a scary vampire. Help yourself to the sweets! Don’t be shy, there’s plenty for all.”

Hands reached into the bowl.

An earnest face looked up. “Lady, you look just like a witch.”

The old woman smiled. “Why, thank you, it’s a great costume, isn’t it?”

The smile turned to a grin as she closed the door. The effects of the spell would be temporary, but this would be a Halloween to remember.

Keith R. Burdon enjoys writing and eating cake, but not necessarily in that particular order.



The Call

by Tom Trussel

At long last, the monsters have found me! I hear their calls from up and down the street. Closing in. Surrounding me.

My stink of fear must attract them. I tear open a pack of perfumed wipes with shaking hands. I wipe myself down hurriedly. That should throw them off the scent.

But no. They are at the door! It's all I can do to keep quiet. Maybe they won't hear me and go away.

The doorbell chimes. The door is opened, despite my protests.

Then that call again, chilling me to the bone. That terrible call.

"Trick or treat!"

Tom Trussel lives in Norway with his family and assorted snow shovels. Read his stories:
TomTrussel.com



Guilty

by Luis Manuel Torres

“Oliver, you have been found guilty of all charges,” said the judge. “You are hereby sentenced to death. As a vampire, you have the choice on how you would like to go—death by sunlight, or would you prefer the stake?”

Oliver clenched his fangs as he glared at the judge. “Neither,” he said. “I choose to battle the werewolf.”

“You mean death by werewolf.”

“No, I mean to defeat the werewolf.”

“Sure you do,” said the judge as he began his transformation to Oliver’s horror.

“Wait!” exclaimed Oliver. “Not yet. I’m still handcuffed.”

“Too late,” howled the judge. “Run.”

Luis Manuel Torres, author of Midnight Animals & Fox Vision. Find him on Wattpad [@lobo1989](#).



Fresh Sushi by Warren Benedetto

Did you know that 40% of all humans live near the ocean?
~~They~~ did.

For millions of years, they bred. They planned. Waited. And, when the time was right...they attacked.

They had no weapons, just an alien intelligence infinitely more advanced than ours. And tentacles. So many tentacles.

I signed up to fight, to defend against the invertebrate hordes, but we were powerless to stop their assault. Cities fell. Societies failed. Billions died. The lucky were enslaved, forced by their new masters to farm food. And the unlucky...?

We *are* the food.

Expensive delicacies, like sushi.

Best served raw.

Warren Benedetto writes short fiction about horrible people doing horrible things.
www.warrenbenedetto.com



Payback by N.E. Rule

Josh peers at the oldest cottage in Lake Town where his football coach, old Mr Cranky-Pants, must be asleep.

His phone lights up: *Where are you?*

Coming, he texts back. The Halloween party is his alibi.

He tosses a roll of toilet paper into the trees. As it sails overhead, it ribbons through the branches. After the front yard is a ghostly white, Josh runs around back to continue.

But he feels the ground give way, and sinks over his head, into a slime pit.

From the shadows, Mr Crankshaw, a former athlete himself, shoves the outhouse back into place.

N.E. Rule attended Ryerson for creative writing and business communications.

sunrisestrategy.com/writing.php



Two Pumpkins by Gabriella Balcom

Pumpkins of all sizes covered the ground. Children ran from one to another, clamouring over them. Scary faces were carved into some, others had witches, cats, ghosts, and other seasonal designs.

The boy pointed. “Buy that one.”

“No,” the girl beside him argued. “*This* one.”

“I’ll get both,” their mother said. “We’ll carve them tomorrow.”

ONCE THEY FELL ASLEEP, the pumpkins on the kitchen counter moved ever-so-slightly. Holes opened up atop both, and spiders emerged.

They blanketed the floor within seconds, then crawled underneath each bedroom door. Swarming the mother and children, the arachnids scuttled into their noses and ears.

Gabriella Balcom writes fantasy, horror, romance, and sci-fi, and has 347 works accepted for publication. Facebook: [@GabriellaBalcom.lonestarauthor](https://www.facebook.com/GabriellaBalcom.lonestarauthor)



Nocturnal Blossoms by Vijayaraj Mahendraraj

He was a gardener. Yet, his flowers were sickly. Seemingly cursed, they crumbled despite his best efforts. Alone, homeless, cachectic. He tended weeds and brambles, finding solace in plying his trade.

A misty veil shrouded Halloween night. He wearily wandered the abandoned graveyard. Shovel in hand, he considered morbidly digging his tomb. Then, he spotted them atop graves—nocturnal blossoms. Precious petals glistened under moonlight. He found his answer—a most effective fertiliser. Corpses.

He turned, hearing the distant laughter of rascallions defacing gravestones. His grip on the shovel tightened. He blended into the mist, hunting for his newfound fertiliser.

*Passionate writer. Published in Year Four DM Anthology and Grimdark Anthology with BHP.
Twitter: [@vijayaraj613](https://twitter.com/vijayaraj613)*



Rocky Road

by W. Ed George

My life began along a rocky road in a cashew-brown house with marshmallow trim beside a milk chocolate forest.

Life turned bitter on my fifth Halloween, as costumed Michael Jacksons moon-walked up that road to our doorstep. I don't know which gloved hand grabbed me, or how I joined my *new* Mom and Dad all those years ago. Rocky road.

I'm a big boy now who knows houses aren't made of candy.

Still, my parents ask, "What do you remember about *before*?"

I regress, tasting former sweetness and acrid childhood lost. Then deliver, by rote, the only safe answer: "nothing."

W. Ed George is a recovering journalist who resides in a haunted house in Central California.



Questions Later by Garrison McKnight

The car coasted to a stop, out of gas. Annoyed, Kyle got out of the car, grabbing a gas can from the trunk. *Why 'didn't I fill up before bringing the kids Trick or Treating?*

“Stay here. I’m going for gas.”

“But, Dad, it’s dark and we’re scared,” Thomas whined.

“Don’t be such a candy ass, Thomas. Just protect your sister.” Kyle walked off in the direction of town.

“Look, Kyle, ’I found a gun.” Nancy pulled a pistol from under the seat.

“Give me that.” Thomas grabbed it from her.

When Kyle returned, Thomas shot first, asked questions later.

Garrison McKnight is merely a figment of the imagination.



Haunted Attraction

by Victoria Brun

I've always been terrified of those haunted attractions that pop up around Halloween. You know the ones—where actors pretend to be zombies, serial killers, ghosts, mad doctors.

I went on one when I was twelve, and I recall a lady covered in fake blood screaming for help as she was stabbed by a masked man with a prop knife.

As I hurried by them, I thought this would be the perfect place to commit murder. Your victim could scream all night. No one would help.

That's why I'm here tonight. My husband has hit me for the last time.

Victoria Brun has stories in Daily Science Fiction, Uncharted Magazine, and beyond.



Halloween Dinner

by Avery Hunter

The scalpel glistens crimson.

He makes another cut, slicing carefully.

He moulds the cutlet with his hands, rounding the edges, adjusting it minutely.

Across the skin, remnants of a tattoo add depth to the canvas, but also tells a tale that can't be told. He *tuts*, abandons the lump to one side.

The long pig squirms, her eyes wide, as he closes in for another steak.

Knife poised, his eyes flick to the ready-prepared Halloween decoration hanging above them. He makes a mental note to ensure the gory bones are clean before he hangs the welcoming skeleton in his yard.

Avery Hunter invented writing, the quokka, and mudguards for bicycles. linktr.ee/AuthorAveryHunter



Buried Alive

by S. Jade Path

Mikael set the spade down, mopping his brow. He walked to the black dog tied to the fence, reaching down to give a scratch. The dog trustingly wagged his tail, tongue lolling.

With perfect timing, the priest exited the newly constructed church to perform the blessing. Mikael led the dog to the grave's edge, pushing him in gently, then quickly working to return the excavated dirt.

Barks turned to terrified howls.

The hole filled steadily. The howling stopped. Tears streaked Mikael's cheeks.

The priest waited serenely.

The red-eyed spectre appeared. The priest walked back inside. Securely guarded by the Kyrkogrim.

S. Jade Path has a penchant for strolling amongst demons and forging shadows into fiction.
linktr.ee/SJadePath



Surprise by Rachel L. Tilley

“Meet me in the woods,” Tommy had asked her. He knew she loved Halloween—she thought he might propose.

With no sign of her beau, she instead found people wearing pumpkin heads—dozens of them. Surrounding her, they cackled and shrieked joyously.

Panic swelled up in her chest as they closed off any means of escape.

They spun and danced and partied.

Her heart felt as though it might break out, so quickly and roughly it was pumping.

Then it burst.

Tommy removed his costume as he leant over her fallen body. “I thought she’d find it funny,” he wept.

Rachel L. Tilley writes short stories in the fantasy and horror genres. [@rachelltiley](#)



Practical Joke

by Warren Benedetto

My wife's scream echoed down the hall.

Panicked, I sprinted into the nursery. "What happened?"

Alyssa was on her back, covered in plaster dust and laughing hysterically. "Look..." More laughter. "In the wall."

I recoiled as I saw the child-sized skeleton wedged between the studs. "Holy shit."

"The previous owner had one sick sense of humour."

"You're telling me."

She smiled mischievously. "Should we leave it?"

I examined the plasterboard Alyssa had removed from the wall, then slipped it into a trash bag before she could see the bloody fingernail marks clawed on the inside.

"Yeah." I smiled. "We should."

Warren Benedetto writes short fiction about horrible people doing horrible things.

www.warrenbenedetto.com



For Posterity by Matthew Pritt

Leigh let Adam's head rest on her shoulder. His unwashed hair felt oily against her cheek. Their parents stood beside them.

"Good!" the photographer said. "Just like that." He snapped the picture.

Leigh shook free. Her dad picked Adam up and set him on the bed.

"Thank you for coming on such short notice," her mom told the photographer. "We've wanted a family portrait, and Adam had been too sick to pose for a picture."

When it was developed, Leigh was thankful that everyone else was captured in stillness, too, their expressions forever unchanging, just as poor Adam's had been.

Matthew Pritt lives in West Virginia with his five cats and writes primarily speculative and horror.



Ad Meliora

by Hazel Ragaire

The best belong to me: Loch Ness, Kraken, Leviathan, Lyngbakr.

Rising from the deep, antiquity's monsters destroyed, and bore harpoon and gunpowder scars with pride. My modern monsters know size doesn't determine devastation. And so they recalibrated themselves. Sulphur-based life flourishes now, disdaining the sun. It gathers, basking in the vents, pulsing, changing, waiting for evolution's inevitability. A watery world is all they desire, and they will slip inside, acclimating to a body made of 60% water, offering 140 grams of sulphur: a buffet. They will trade my depths for a new frontier made of flesh and blood and bone.

Hazel Ragaire breathes life into monster monstrosities, sprinkling sci-fi and fantasy everywhere.
Twitter [@HRagaire](https://twitter.com/HRagaire).



The Dead

by Leanbh Pearson

They are dead, aren't they?

The infected were reviled—nothing more than defective neurotransmitters animating a corpse. But they didn't seem dead. I was sure they had memories and remnant emotions.

From my window, I watched my neighbours force their decaying limbs to move, struggling across our street to their boarded-up homes.

A child reached for the doorknob where he'd lived. His parents turned away, unable to watch the skin slough off his hand. These were the dead, trapped in rotting bodies and putrefying flesh.

I saw their true horror—the self-awareness in their eyes. *They* knew they weren't dead.

Bio

*Leanbh Pearson is an Australian LGBTQI dark fiction author. Twitter, Facebook & Instagram
[@leanbhpearson](#)*



Graveyard Flash by Catherine Kenwell

“Every year, these bloody kids think, ‘Halloween, oooh, let’s party at the cemetery.’ They’ll bring their candles and flashlights, snoop around. I say, let’s show them what we’re made of,” lamented Edison.

“The electromagnetic light trick?” asked Tesla.

“Oh yeah. It’ll be easy.”

“Death flash?”

“Yep.”

“OK, humans already radiate a low-intensity light...let’s see. At death, it’s 1,000 times brighter.”

“Uh-huh.”

“So how many do we kill to keep the lights on?”

Tesla elbowed Edison, and they roared with laughter at their plan. “Let’s make it even more fun. Invite Franklin. There’s supposed to be a thunderstorm Halloween night.”

Catherine Kenwell writes horror and inspirational non-fiction and tries to avoid getting them mixed up.



Melted Things by Rachel L. Tilley

Wax drips. From the candles, from the jack-o'-lanterns, from the doorknob. Wherever I've roamed, a slimy trail runs in my wake.

Sticky things. I've melted the candy. Now it's flypaper. Children's fingers won't like the way they become trapped.

But I'm burning up from the inside and things keep melting.

I'm an unwilling spider, weaving a gummy web. Except, I don't need to eat the treats I catch—at least, not for sustenance.

What shall I do with the little brats who cannot free themselves in time? Perhaps nothing, and here they will remain...lest my fire claims them too.

Rachel L. Tilley writes short stories in the fantasy and horror genres. [@rachellttilley](https://twitter.com/rachellttilley)



Oh, Pumpkin!

by Jameson Grey

There was a sticky orange mess on the kitchen floor. “Jack, what happened?”

“Sorry, knocked it off the counter. I’ll clean it up later,” he grunted from the settee, meaning he wouldn’t.

Jack had also “forgotten” to buy Hallowe’en treats on his way home, so I’d had to go out myself.

I’m fed up with his crap!

I’d been looking forward to carving the pumpkin. I slid the longest knife from the wooden block. Well, the kids were going to get a trick *and* treat tonight.

“Oh, pumpkin...” I called, heading for the front room to work on a real *Jack-o’-Lantern*.

Jameson Grey’s work has been published in magazines, online and in numerous anthologies.
jameson-grey.com



The Milkman by Vijayaraj Mahendraraj

“Just one more Halloween show, please!”

The hungry babysitter sighed, grumbling at the empty milk carton.

“Last one, Noah.”

The blares of an emergency announcement resounded, interrupting them.

“This just in. The serial killer Knox Vandy is at large. Escaping Argus Penitentiary, he was last seen assaulting a milkman before fleeing,” announced an alarmed anchorman. “Viewers are advised not to answer—”

Knock! Knock! Knock!

They turned to the bolted front door. Peeling back the curtains, they saw an undersized milkman’s uniform with fresh red splotches, a wide twitchy smile, a shattered milk bottle, and bloodshot eyes watching them in turn.

*Passionate writer. Published in Year Four DM Anthology and Grimdark Anthology with BHP.
Twitter: [@vijayaraj613](https://twitter.com/vijayaraj613)*



Faceless Ones

by Corinne Pollard

A strand of the veil cracks once a year. It slices across other strands like a paper cut scarring fingerprints. The opening shines an eye-burning beam, dissolving the mist and rupturing the stillness of the Faceless Ones.

They stir their thick flesh, chattering their hand fangs to chew on the jaws of their palms. Their blank heads creak, rotating every second at every ninety-degree angle.

From the beam, a scent beckons. A crisp, raw aroma. Meaty faces are out there.

They hunt, invisible to the clueless crowds, often tricked by masks and lanterns until they are lucky. Someone was careless.

Corinne is a UK disabled horror writer published in Sirens Call and Trembling with Fear. Twitter: [@CorinnePWriter](https://twitter.com/CorinnePWriter)



Reese's Pieces by W. Ed George

A pavlovian response blossoms via mass delusion to forbidden nutty sweetness in sugary shells. Slavering, we mourn her. America's actress, that comely A-lister in pearls and pink sweaters inhabiting a million hearts—now scattered like crab bait along a very exclusive beach.

That she died on Halloween, confuses. That 78% of our costumed progeny suffer peanut allergies explains the weepy eyes and sniffing associated with nut-related transgressions, yet confounds.

Do we, this grey November morning, grieve the ambitious blonde who portrayed us on *Netflix* so convincingly, then befouled our shoreline? Or suffer hypochondria linked to helicopter parenting and falsely-maligned candy?

W. Ed George is a recovering journalist who resides in a haunted house in Central California.



Last Dance

by Nancy Pica Renken

We were born in the time of water. We lapped the rain that quenched our thirst. We danced on the shore of the sea, our marketplace.

We could blame those vultures who came, drilling for oil. Those who blackened our shoreline conjured oppressive heat and littered dead sea things, scorched whiter than sand, upon our beaches. Those drenched in the blood of our people—but, aren't we, too, to blame?

Clenching our blood money, our waistlines thickened. As we danced, the sea dwindled. The rains trickled. Searing heat devoured our flesh.

Our folly lies among our bones in this desert.

Nancy Pica Renken, a short story and flash fiction writer, can be found at
<https://www.nancyprenken.com/>



Grounded by Gabriella Balcom

“Dad’ll blister our butts,” Charlotte said.
“He’s gone and won’t know,” her brother Tom replied. “We’ll return before him.”

They ran across the lot behind their home—the fastest way to the Halloween carnival. Despite being grounded, they’d planned to go.

Tom tripped over a fallen branch. “Dang it.” He kicked the closest tree.

It lashed him with a limb, drawing blood. Another pinned him down.

Roots shot up from the ground, immobilising the screaming Charlotte. She gasped when they tightened around her.

Dripping, gaping maws opened up in two tree trunks.

Soon, the sound of crunching filled the air.

Gabriella Balcom writes fantasy, horror, romance, and sci-fi, and has 347 works accepted for publication. Facebook: [@GabriellaBalcom.lonestarauthor](https://www.facebook.com/GabriellaBalcom.lonestarauthor)



Infidelity Cure **by D.M. Burdett**

Urgent knocking woke Jaycee. She opened her eyes into the subdued light of the hotel room.

Dan, her husband, the surgeon, watched over her.

“Police! Open up!” More insistent banging.

She remembered the tangle of sheets, her yoga instructor, Dan’s angry face.

A heart monitor blipped next to her. “What have you done?” she breathed, terrified.

“I don’t like to share.” His smile didn’t touch his eyes.

The door exploded. Officers spilled into the room but faltered at the sight.

“A hemicorporectomy,” Dan whispered. “I amputated your body below the waist.”

Jaycee made a choking sound.

“No more screwing around.”

*Between writing, working, and designing book covers, D.M. Burdett manages to get some sleep.
Sometimes... <https://www.dmburdett.com/>*



They Wait by Hazel Ragaire

At Ronan's party, smoke curls into Clara's lungs, quieting her mind. She remembers her mother's stories, remembers when she pulled Clara aside, but instead of periods, she spoke of ghosts.

"You'll see them. It's our curse."

And when her mind quiets, she screams and screams as the dead surround her, bullet-riddled or dropping bloated flesh upon the floor. She runs through them, out the front door but they stand everywhere: millennia of dead in skins or rags or waistcoats.

She won't smoke weed anymore. Clara shivers, knowing she walks through them every day. They close in, waiting. They have time.

*Hazel Ragaire breathes life into monster monstrosities, sprinkling sci-fi and fantasy everywhere.
Twitter [@HRagaire](https://twitter.com/HRagaire).*



Sharp Candy by Warren Benedetto

“**A**nd don’t eat anything until we’ve checked it.” Sarah straightened her son’s mask. “Last year, a kid got candy with needles stuck in it.”

Her husband, John, scoffed. “That’s an urban legend.”

“It’s not! I saw it on Facebook.”

“I can guarantee you, his candy is safe.”

“Oh, yeah? How?”

“Mom, let’s goooo...” Aidan whined.

“Well, we’re not taking any chances.” Sarah took Aidan’s hand. “Come.”

John waved. “Have fun! Bring some for me!”

A few minutes later, John’s doorbell rang. A group of trick-or-treaters was outside.

John pressed the last needle through the Snickers bar, then opened the door.

Warren Benedetto writes short fiction about horrible people doing horrible things.

www.warrenbenedetto.com



The Bowl by Gully Novaro

“Warning! Take only one!”

I look at the sign beside the bowl and scoff. Taking two would be an asshole move. I *never* take more than one. But the words look like a challenge: I double dog dare you.

I investigate the porch; no cameras around. The bowl seems normal. I stick my hand in, inspect it for tricks. Everything looks okay.

First candy. Nothing.

I put my hand in the bowl again. Nobody screams at me.

Grab a second candy bar. Silence.

I take it out.

I walk away from the porch, disappointed. Then my blood starts to boil.

Gully Novaro is a non-binary writer from Argentina who loves dark tales. Twitter: [@GullyNovaro](https://twitter.com/GullyNovaro)



Unmasked Menace by John H. Dromey

“**Y**ou’re my second adult trick-or-treater tonight. What *are* you?”
“I’m a vampire.”

“You don’t look like one. Not like the other man. He wore a dark cape, and he had a pasty face with dribbles of a red liquid on his chin.”

“Makeup and paraffin fangs. Rather than suffocate, Sean changed clothes with me. He couldn’t breathe with this sea monster mask on. No one can.”

“Oh, yeah? How come you’re able to wear it then?”

“I told you. I’m a vampire. I don’t *need* to breathe.” He removed his mask.
“My fangs are real. Guess what treat I want.”

John H. Dromey has contributed stories to over twenty Black Hare Press anthologies.



Unwelcome Visitors by Keith R. Burdon

Heaving a sigh from somewhere around his toes, Mike opened the door. Damned kids—some of them old enough to know better—in their ridiculous costumes, begging with menaces.

The hooded figure in the doorway looked way too tall to be a kid, but you could never tell nowadays. “Trick or treat, I suppose?”

“I can assure you, Mr Sheron, it’s no trick. It’s not much of a treat either...”

Mike clocked the scythe. “Hold on, are you *him*?”

“Oh yes,” the figure murmured.

“But... but... I’m not dead,” Mike stammered.

Death chuckled. “I wouldn’t be so sure about that...”

Keith R. Burdon enjoys writing and eating cake, but not necessarily in that particular order.



Gutted

by Kimberly Rei

The carved pumpkin's mouth was caught in an eternal scream of agony. Children giggled as they raced up the steps and past the bright orange gourd, eager to add to their haul of candy.

They couldn't hear the silent, wailing horror so close to their feet.

A man slipped around the costumed horde and kissed a woman on the cheek. "Mmmmm. Is that pie I smell?"

She nodded and laughed, pulling him into the house.

The pumpkin shivered. The scent of its baking flesh wafted out from an open window. On the porch, a candle slowly cooked what was left.

Kimberly Rei likes to write spooky tales that make you look over your shoulder.



Words by Alden Terzo

The demon's voice was deep. Smooth. His words of promise and beauty dripped like nectar upon Teresa. She shuddered as the demon entered her through his words.

The young priest incanting over her had frightened eyes, but she saw determination there as well. His voice steady as he recited words of light. Light that something within Teresa longed for.

She had to act or be lost to the intoxicating words.

"Please, Father," she beseeched.

As he leaned forward to anoint her forehead, Teresa thrust her long nails into his neck.

His warm blood caressed her as the demon filled her.

*Alden Terzo writes about disquieting things he glimpses out of the corner of his eye. Twitter
[@AmbassadorAlden](https://twitter.com/AmbassadorAlden)*



Happy Place by Brett Mitchell Kent

I brushed the doll's hair roughly, snagging on tangles and curls. Her powder-pink bouffant dress shimmered in the trembling fluorescence of my hobby room. Taking special care to smooth the fabric, I plucked away any stray hairs, lint, or threads. She needed to be perfect to stay.

After positioning her carefully in the centre of my collection, I stepped back to admire the work. My reflection beamed back at me in dozens of cold eyes.

I sighed.

"There'll be none of that. This is a happy place!"

I wiped the tear from her plump cheek. "A happy place," I reminded.

Horror writer Brett Mitchell Kent lives in northern Indiana with his husband and daughters.



Tricky Treats by Matt Krizan

Tucker didn't protest when his mom insisted, as she did every year, that he go trick-or-treating with his older brother, Aaron. Arguing about such things had never done any good before.

He didn't fight back when, as Aaron did every year, he picked on Tucker throughout the evening, then demanded all of his candy. That had never done any good either. The bag Tucker gave Aaron was different from the one he'd carried around all night, but Aaron didn't seem to notice.

Later, as Aaron seized and vomited blood, their mother called 911.

Tucker knew it wouldn't do any good.

Matt Krizan's stories have appeared in various publications, including Daily Science Fiction and Martian Magazine. www.mattkrizan.com



Masquerade by James Rumpel

“**W**hat’s nice about costume parties,” said Lyla, “is that nobody knows who you are. You’re free to act on your urges.”

Before anyone replied, a shout came from the entryway. “Trick-or-treaters!”

Everyone except Lyla ran to greet the children.

What should I do? thought Lyla. *Should I give into the desire?*

The guests burst back into the ballroom carrying three children. Two of the youngsters were unconscious. The other fought to escape the grip of a large man.

Someone shouted, “Time for the feast.”

Lyla stared at the scene before her, fighting to resist the urge to save the children.

James Rumpel writes sci-fi, fantasy, and horror. His wife writes to-do lists.



Sickle, Scythe by John A. McColley

“Sickle, scythe, count to five!” Children sang, hands up in claws like monsters, spooky music issuing from a radio in a plastic cauldron in the front yard. There was still an hour before Trick-or-Treating. They were anxious. “Don your mask to stay alive!” The old chant dissolved into laughter, then yelling.

“Hey! Stop pushing!” a witch hollered at a ghost, and they fell near the bushes beside the porch.

The shadows shifted.

“Not yet,” one hissed. “They think the old tricks still work. These treats will be free for the taking when the sugar hunt begins.”

“Finger pricks, that makes...”

John A. McColley writes from his cave in New England. Come visit him at

www.patreon.com/JohnAMcColley



The Bells by Ron Fein

Listen—can you hear the bells?

Children's laughter echoes through suburban streets. Superheroes and princesses squeal, plump cheeks engorged with sweets, pillowcases bulging with chocolates.

Can you hear the bells in ancient song?

This night, once, was a vigil. As the border with the Otherworld dissolved, men lit fires for protection.

Can you hear the song of the bells?

Mumming and guising on All Hallows' Eve, Samhain—mere echoes. Once, children were paid in tribute to the monstrous Elders beneath the world of men.

Can you hear the bells?

They sing a song of death.

They're singing it for you.

Ron Fein lives near Boston. Find him at ronfein.com.



Boy by Blaise Langlois

It is after 9 p.m. When the doorbell rings, I am not startled. Even Chester, lying in the armchair, does nothing more than twitch his left ear. I open the door and am greeted by the cutest cowboy anyone has ever seen. He holds out a small cardboard donation box. I reach into my pocket and pull out some coins. As he accepts them, he looks up at me with the palest eyes. He steps over the threshold and into my foyer.

He comes every year, but I don't have the heart to tell him he doesn't live here anymore.

Author and poet, Blaise Langlois, never turns down the chance to tell a spooky story.
<https://ravenfictionca.wordpress.com/>



The Straggler **by Gully Novaro**

Almost midnight and you are watching your comfort scary movie, eating leftover candy. Best part of Halloween.

Your doorbell rings at the same time as the movie, and you jump out of your sofa. Interactive jump scare. You laugh it off and go to open the door.

“Trick-or-trick!” the boy in the straightjacket says.

You look around, there’s nobody else.

“Where are your parents?”

“Ask about my disguise!”

You don’t.

“I’m dressed like my dad!”

“Where is he?”

“He just entered through your back door!”

You turn around in time to see a man in a straightjacket, swinging his machete.

Gully Novaro is a non-binary writer from Argentina who loves dark tales. Twitter: [@GullyNovaro](https://twitter.com/GullyNovaro)



Cremator Innocence

by Addison Smith

Soot and ash caked Jonathan's throat with every breath. He coughed and his body jerked, with no room for his convulsions. His arms bound, he screamed.

The cremation chamber loomed around him, like the spirits of those he had placed inside—those perfect bodies unsullied by life.

"I didn't." Tears ran black soot down the sides of his face.

Tiny pilot flames flicked on all around.

"I didn't touch her!" The man didn't listen. His wife was dead, prepared and cremated by himself.

As the flames began, Jonathan knew his innocence. He never touched her.

It was only a peek.

Addison Smith is a writer of speculative fiction. You can find him on Twitter [@AddisonCSmith](https://twitter.com/AddisonCSmith).



What Time?

by Jacek Wilkos

A woken by the doorbell, James dragged himself out of his armchair and shambled off to the door.

A hooded figure in a long black robe stood on the porch.

“You know what time it is? Halloween’s long over, I don’t have any candy left.”

“I didn’t come for candy, but for you,” the stranger replied in a low, deep voice.

Chills ran down James’s spine.

“I ain’t going nowhere with you!”

“But you already did.” The figure raised his hand, pointing the finger.

James looked back.

His body lay motionless in the armchair with a bottle of spilled ginger ale.

Engineer, husband, father of two daughters. Writes horror micro-fiction. Loves everything that’s scary and dark. [@Jacek.W.Wilkos](#)



Sweaty Latex by Dorian J. Sinnott

The inside of the pumpkin mask stank, steamy with the scent of spray paint, hot sweat, and latex. Ritchie peeled it away from his drenched and sticky neck, hating that damned thing. He begged his mother for something less...*constricting*. But she insisted they were the popular thing that season. And her little Ritchie couldn't miss out on what the other kids were wearing.

As the night went on, it became harder to breathe. Not just from the stench, but the tightness gripping his neck like winding vines. Squeezing his throat until his eyes bulged, popping clean from their sockets.

Dorian J. Sinnott's work has appeared in 200+ publications and been nominated for numerous awards. www.doriansinnott.com



Heard

by Kimberly Rei

Frost-kissed webs enclosed the grove where a woman slept. She'd arrived on Samhain, at the thinnest edge of the Veil, running from the kind of monster legend ignores: human. Her flesh bore bruises and cuts. Her soul was far more damaged. Beaten for being a witch, for burning dinner, for breathing.

She had run until her legs gave out, then fell to the ground begging the spirits' help.

When she awoke, she would find her pursuer. Wrapped in a cocoon of sticky strands, he would never beat her again. Only on that sacred night could the spiders hear her call.

Kimberly Rei likes to write spooky tales that make you look over your shoulder.



Alive

by Darlene Holt

They say the house on Swanson Hill is alive. That it bleeds from the walls and inhales its victims as they ascend its creaky stairs. They land in the basement where the house's bile corrodes their skin and toothy floorboards feast on their bones. People have heard the screams of children. Truth or Dare. A Halloween prank gone wrong. It's silly to believe in old wives' tales. But lucky for me, the tale of a living house lures them into my midst as I lurk in the hollowed walls, stalking them through the floor grates. Until the moment's just right.

Darlene Holt is a writer, editor, and educator from California, where she enjoys writing horror stories.



Last Halloween by Carla Eliot

Burning amber clouds tremble; scorched leaves twitching on the ends of twisted fingers. The tree trunks are rough, their deep lines running up from the earth, from the dank darkness, and reaching up towards the unattainable iron sky.

As if sensing me, cold air disturbs the leaves. Fallen, broken carcasses.

Halloween. I can almost smell it: cinnamon, freshly turned soil, burning wood. Rot.

I recall the whipping flames. Coils of black smoke pushing into my mouth. Heat enveloping my writhing limbs.

Most memories have faded, melted with my mind. But the pain remains, growing hotter. New flames grasping from below.

Carla Eliot's work has been published by Quill & Crow Publishing House and SmashBear Publishing. carlaeliot.com



Siren Song

by Ngo Binh Anh Khoa

So divine a song suddenly weaves through the stirring leaves and swaying branches, calling out to the campers nearby and filling their dreaming minds with unearthly visions of bliss and ecstasy.

Aroused, they leave their campsite and their slumbering partners, moved by the melodious enchantments that reverberate within the night. Their feet traverse the cold, moon-kissed sand and walk toward the lone songstress amid the darkened waves ahead, whose lower body's hidden beneath the thrashing sea.

Mindlessly, they continue toward her until their bodies are wholly swallowed by the ravenous waters, taken away to a realm beyond all salvation's reach.

Ngo Binh Anh Khoa is a teacher in Vietnam. Find him on Facebook: [@khoa.ngo.5059](https://www.facebook.com/khoa.ngo.5059).



Pumpkin Patches

by John A. McColley

Someone's jazzed up the scarecrow with a hockey mask and cheesy embroidered pumpkins. A plastic machete glistening with pink "blood" hangs from a string sewn into the ragged sleeve. Poor guy has straw for hands. How's he gonna slash anyone with a blunt weapon and no hands?

How's that even scary?

Which gets me to thinking... It's *not* scary, unless someone *makes* it scary. I pull the guy down, put on his outfit, splitting the plastic machete and hiding mine inside.

The sun hangs low. Shadows stretch. The first teens enter the maze, laughing.

Soon, laughter will turn to screams.

John A. McColley writes from his cave in New England. Come visit him at

www.patreon.com/JohnAMcColley



Costume by Gully Novaro

I couldn't believe what I saw. Some asshole stood in the middle of the party, wearing the costume Jessalee wore last Halloween. The one with the burlap sack mask. The one she wore when she killed those kids. Including my sister.

Someone should beat some sense into them, and that someone was me.

I approached, and they retreated, staying three steps ahead of me. I followed until we were alone, and then attacked—

An empty costume.

The mask beckoned. I put it on.

Where did the knife come from? I didn't know.

But I knew what it was meant for.

Gully Novaro is a non-binary writer from Argentina who loves dark tales. Twitter: [@GullyNovaro](https://twitter.com/GullyNovaro)



Smile by Brianna Witte

Warm fresh blood dripped down my arms as I sat still against the hay roll, the nails pounded deep into my hands to keep the jack-o'-lantern from falling out of my grip. I stared at the mirror, tears running down my face.

My mouth ached for relief I knew would not come; the stitches pinning my lips into a permanent, creepy smile.

“Oh, why do you look so glum?” my mother said, focusing the camera on me. “All I want is a perfect picture.”

She looked at me, her eyes full of excitement

“Now, smile for the camera, my love!”

*Brianna Witte is the author of “Witches and Vampires” a fast-paced, fantasy adventure novella.
Instagram: [@briannawitteauthor](https://www.instagram.com/briannawitteauthor)*



Almighty Saint **by Benny Sabbatelli**

He'd attempted to guess how tall he was. He, himself, was five foot ten, but the man towered over him with such great stature that the bones in his shoulders were starting to arch forwards. In Brazil, where he grew up, there were stories of statues like this one coming to life every night at midnight to cause havoc across the village.

But then, as fast as he blinked, the statue turned towards the Halloween party and joined the others.

He was so amazed and relieved he missed the real statues start to close in around him, licking their lips.

Benny Sabbatelli is a British Italian horror author with a passion for humanity horror.



Call by Roan Dorn

This is our only night on Earth. Hear us whisper, little mouse, beckoning, smiling invitation. You've always wondered at the rickety dark house at the end of the street, empty, at the edge of town. There are candles in the windows now, and pumpkins flicker-smiling golden on the porch in front—come see! They promise sweets, and the place delicious creepiness—perfect on this night. Come, come down this way, little mouse. Come, come...cross the walls, so thin this night that you can see through them and marvel. Follow us...follow me...lose your way, little mouse, and *forget*.

Roan Dorn writes everywhere—on horseback, on the balcony, while his students take their tests...



Red Hourglass by Lori Green

Charlie swam towards consciousness, his skull throbbing. His eyes fluttered open, but he could barely see through the thick, sticky web encasing his face and body. He jerked, but the material tightened. Branches swayed above.

Something was coming.

His vision blurred, but he could just make out a shape. A red hourglass. It grew larger and larger until eight legs wrapped around his flesh, squeezing him in a death-like grip.

“Remember me, darling?” the soft voice crooned in his ear. “You lied. Together forever, you said.”

Charlie choked on a scream, as she stuck her venomous tongue down his throat.

Lori Green is a horror writer walking the fine line between macabre and madness. Twitter:
[@LoriG1408](https://twitter.com/LoriG1408)



Guard Dog

by S. Jade Path

I no longer fear walking home at night. Not since I acquired Coco, or maybe Coco acquired me...

I had cut down a side street, too tired to go around. There was a scrape of footsteps following behind me. I found myself pinned against the wall—

Until I wasn't.

A growl. A scream abruptly cut short. My assailant lay dead; throat torn, chest shredded.

A large dog trotted over to me, its muzzle bloody, its shaggy coat pitch black, and unsettling eyes—a green so bright, it almost glowed.

Now, it guides me home every night, my ferocious guard dog.

S. Jade Path has a penchant for strolling amongst demons and forging shadows into fiction.

linktr.ee/SJadePath



Risen Curse

by Jodie Francis

On Halloween night, the residents of the town of Locke dropped dead. The young, the old, the sick, the healthy. Everyone.

But the town wasn't to remain vacant, as the gravestones began to shake.

The dead rose to claim back their town. They visited their old homes and removed the bodies, dragging them, grunting and groaning, to their old graves, and filling them over once more.

Many hundreds of years before, witches had placed the Risen Curse on the town on Halloween night.

It worked.

The Risen bowed to the coven—their new leaders, the bringers of life—once more.

Jodie Francis has been published by Black Hare Press, Black Ink Fiction and Paramour Ink.



The Dare

by Helen M. Merrick

They dared him, and, scornful of Halloween folklore, he accepted. Armed with snacks and thick woollen blankets, he settled against a headstone. He watched the sunset ignite the horizon, gnarled yews and tumbledown church silhouetted against the splendour. Smugly confident, he welcomed the night.

Darkness fell rapidly. Clouds smothered the moon, and the town's illuminations fell short of the graveyard. Blinded, his bravado failed. He cast around, fingers twisting the blankets. *What was that? Footfalls?* Breath held, he listened...a piercing cackle roared through his ears. Terrified, he bolted.

Too late.

The spirits he didn't believe in swiftly claimed him.

Helen M. Merrick scribbles short stories while dreaming about writing a novel.
<https://authorhelenmerrick.wordpress.com/>



Revival Fire

by Ann Wuehler

Judy sprang up from between the roots of the old cottonwood, the night air crisping her new skin.

“It’s Halloween,” I said.

But Judy winked at me. “As if you’d revive me at Christmas.”

We walked along, fingers hooked together—sisters forever, witches for eternity—the swollen orange moon bathing us, and the wind tinkling the nearby witch bells I’d hung just in case.

Our bare feet took us to the house of the Reverend Cap, who’d had us burned alive just last year.

Except you can’t kill a real witch with mere fire.

Luckily, not the case for reverends.

Ann Wuehler, a writer from Eastern Oregon with soon to be five novels to her name.



Lifelike

by Vijayaraj Mahendraraj

“The competition is in two days, and this is not a costume,” scoffed Andy, plucking cardboard bones from Turk’s robes.

“What do I do?” Turk replied, distraught. “I need this! You’ve seen how they judge me.”

“I’d withdraw,” chuckled Andy.

“I can’t! I’m already a joke to them.”

“Then take my advice. Make it realistic. Lifelike. Strike some *real* terror into them. Say, I’ve got an idea...” Andy remarked, reaching into his pocket. Turk’s eyes widened, a glint shining off the pocketknife.

“What do you say?” Andy laughed sadistically.

“Realistic. Lifelike. I’d win,” Turk muttered desperately with a twisted smile.

Passionate writer. Published in Year Four DM Anthology and Grimdark Anthology with BHP.
Twitter: [@vijayaraj613](https://twitter.com/vijayaraj613)



Whack-O-Wax Lips by W. Ed George

Edible kisser, malleable and cold. Neither gum nor candy; less snack than fashion statement.

For that *predatory* waxiness, curated to coax anxious eyes to a cartoonish visage, while you slash the sling blade low. Or wield a makeshift cudgel. Or stomp exposed toes with your jackboot.

Without purpose.

Skipping, singing, jostling—thuggish mates hell-bent on harassment, and a spot of smash and grab on Halloween night. Along a fleabag High Street, gutted by lockdowns, riddled with the homeless, trammelled by modernity, and left for dead.

Puts a smile on your face as you punch and stab and stain. Just because.

W. Ed George is a recovering journalist who resides in a haunted house in Central California.



Abaddon

by Mehzeb R. Chowdhury

“**W**here the bloody hell have you been?”
“I’m retired. Outlived my usefulness, remember?”

“Consider yourself recalled to active duty. Washington. Beijing. Moscow. All down. London cannot follow. Bastards have already bypassed our firewalls. We need all hands on deck.”

“Not my problem.”

Ace hung up.

A meteorite-like chrome-encrusted disc conjured and hissed next to him, projecting a terrifying face above it.

“You’ll have this world by Friday.”

The grotesque octopoid screeched wickedly.

Outside, ethereal leviathans slithered across bloodstained skies, wreaking apocalyptic havoc.

Ace’s mouth salivated.

He wept tenderly, whispering incantations.

Then he bellowed maniacally in atavistic euphoria. “Abaddon. At last.”



Mehzeb R. Chowdhury is a published author and award-winning filmmaker based in the United Kingdom.



Stranger Danger by Reuben Paul

Moonlight glints off wet pavements, shadows clinging to eeriness, and today's newspaper headline—Red Light Killer Strikes Again—is in the forefront of her mind as she walks along quickly in teetering stilettos, heart thumping, ears alert for any small noise.

There! Footsteps. Getting closer. Getting louder. Getting faster.

She quickens her pace, hands clammy, sweat prickling her skin under her tight black dress, acutely aware she's alone and it's gone midnight.

A hand touches her shoulder, fingers digging painfully into her skin. She turns, her hidden knife slashing, then flashing crimson for a moment.

Tomorrow, she'd be frontpage again.

Reuben Paul a British-Australian author and publisher, who transforms, each evening, into dark shadows.



Double Bubble

by W. Ed George

Wadded under my desk at school, hidden to deliver reconstituted sweetness as secret snack.

In my nightmares bad things happened if you munched a recycled glob not your own. If the first chewer was weak, you fell limp. If impaired by blindness, your own world darkened. If they'd killed—*or would in the future*—Double Bubble exacted its most horrific curse.

No legal defence; that pink gob I pried loose half a lifetime ago after Halloween. The year I strangled my twin brother and moved to this facility with electronic doors, weekly showers, and friends who call each other crazy.

W. Ed George is a recovering journalist who resides in a haunted house in Central California.



Compost Mentis by Liam Hogan

The Apocalypse virus turned mature human brains into mush, adults into zombies.

Functioning zombies, able to do the school run, to commute to places of “work”, to shop, cook, and clean. Even to hold inane conversations.

But we kids weren’t fooled. They were brain-dead, they just didn’t know it yet. They couldn’t understand us, and we couldn’t understand them. It was up to us to save the world.

And whether the cause was COVID-19 vaccines or 5G, it didn’t matter. We made our plans on TikTok, on Snapchat, on Instagram. Practised our killer moves. Counting down.

To Halloween. To today.

*Liam Hogan is an award-winning writer, Liars’ League host, and Ministry of Stories mentor.
happyendingnotguaranteed.blogspot.co.uk*



Halloween Mourning

by John A. McColley

I had seen her before—the woman in white with the red rose in her hat band. I hadn't thought anything of it until one Halloween...

The neighbourhood teens had done a number on the small cemetery, paper streaming from otherwise bare trees, a few stones knocked over, pumpkin guts splattered on their faces.

“Some people, eh, miss? No respect.” I said, shoving beer cans into a trash bag. “Hey, watch out for—” But she walked, unfazed, into a fat plastic spider dangling from a branch by a black thread. Don't tell anyone, but really...it passed *through* her...

John A. McColley writes from his cave in New England. Come visit him at

www.patreon.com/JohnAMcColley



Poor Taste

by Corinne Pollard

Unplanned eyeballs swim in my cocktail glass. I slurp and roll them around on my tongue, rejuvenating my aged taste buds before satisfying squishes.

“Why dress up as Dracula?” Poppy, the zombie bartender, frowns, ripping cheek lines.

“Is there a Halloween law that says I can’t?”

Thirsty, I seize the slumped pirate beside me. I lean him over like a jug and slit veins with a protracted nail. Pouring sanguine fluid into my glass, I lick my lips. Vertical again, the pirate flops off his barstool, his heart forever hushed.

“It’s just poor taste, dressing up as someone you know.”

Corinne is a UK disabled horror writer published in Sirens Call and Trembling with Fear. Twitter: [@CorinnePWriter](https://twitter.com/CorinnePWriter)



Mister Crane's by Hillary Lyon

Trick-or-treaters don't have the courage to tromp up to the front door and knock, but they gleefully pose for selfies among the yard decorations. Most popular is the field of bones, where skeletal remains poke out through the grass. A femur here, a rib cage there, a loose skull kicked by callous children.

"Those plastic bones look so real!" the chaperones always comment. "Where does he find them? We must get some for our yard next Halloween."

Mister Crane watches through a slit in his blackout curtains, before returning to his bathroom to scrub the graveyard dirt from his nails.

Since childhood, Hillary Lyon has enjoyed all things speculative and spooky; her writing illustrates this affinity. hillarylyon.wordpress.com



Unholy Scripture by Vijayaraj Mahendraraj

“Where’s that light, Will?”

“It’s dying,” he replied, flashlight flickering.

Within the cramped attic, they discovered concealed manuscripts. Scrawls, otherworldly depictions, and translations by an unhinged mind.

“Let’s summon a spirit. Ooohooohoo...” laughed David dramatically, clapping Will’s shoulder.

David’s chanting of forgotten verses echoed hauntingly about them.

Finishing, he glanced around excitedly. Nothing.

“Just dumb ramblings,” he cursed. The flashlight flickered.

“Let’s go, Will.”

No response.

David turned to Will, petrified. Silvery snaky hair, sunken eye sockets oozing violaceous goo, and a hollow face contorted into a morbid scream. Creaking and wheezing, it faced him. And the light went out.

Passionate writer. Published in Year Four DM Anthology and Grimdark Anthology with BHP.
Twitter: [@yijayaraj613](https://twitter.com/yijayaraj613)



Brains

by Kai Delmas

It's the one night of the year when Holly lets herself remember the old days with glee. Ironical, considering it's also the day everything changed.

After sundown, the thumping begins. Holly puts on her thick leather gloves and steps up to the door.

It's secured with heavy locks and deadbolts. She opens them all and is met by little grabby hands reaching through the bars of her last defence. "Braaiiins... Braaiiins..." they moan.

She smiles at their cute little costumes, turned to rags.

Luckily, Holly had a visitor not long ago, so the contents of her bucket was still fresh.

Kai Delmas loves creating worlds, magic systems, and drabbles. Find him on Twitter [@KaiDelmas](#).



Candy Complements by Andrew Kurtz

“I love your vampire costume, Ted. The chalked skin and fangs look very realistic,” Dave said to the ten-year-old as he placed candy into the boy’s bag.

“Missy, that witch costume is absolutely outstanding. The black hat, the broom—and let’s not forget the green skin—make you a witch perfect for any satanic coven,” Dave complimented the child while filling her bag with goodies.

The doorbell rang again. “Trick or treat!”

Dave grinned. “Don’t go anywhere—you’ll have company very soon,” Dave told the corpses at the kitchen table; Halloween costumes splattered with blood, broom snapped, fangs hanging out.

Andrew Kurtz is a short story horror author whose works appear in numerous horror anthologies
linktr.ee/horror672



Nemesis

by Karen B. Jones

The sun slowly evaporates below the edge of the world. Sleep. Fleeting.
Troubled.

Scratch. From shadowy recesses, it creeps down the wall, taunting me.

Nails scrape, battering my ears as I push my fists against them, cringing.

Closer, closer.

“Stop!” I scream.

Grinding my teeth as tears escape clenched eyes, will this night never end?

It's coming! I cower under sweat-soaked covers, twisting them tightly in my fists, begging for the solace the morning might bring. The sky lightens. Sweet relief is within my grasp.

Unearthly claws scratch the wall behind my head. Too late. I tremble. It is here.

Karen B. Jones is a retired Fire Chief living in NW Montana. Normal is boring.



Candy-Apple Red by Hastings Kidd

“No, Rosie! You’ve already had three!”
“But he’s got one!”

Rosie snatched her brother’s candy apple and raced across the garden, red-painted toes flashing beneath her Halloween costume. As she crammed the sticky, half-eaten mess into her mouth, ants rushed out to gather the dropped pieces.

A NIGHTMARE WOKE ROSIE that night. She sat up, and a movement caught her eye. Red blobs were moving across her moonlit eiderdown. *Ants again with the candy apple?* That didn’t make sense.

Then she looked more closely. It wasn’t apple. The ants were carrying toes, and each toenail was painted in candy-apple red.

Hastings Kidd writes short fiction and lives in rural England with his family.



Sweet Meats by Kai Delmas

The little imps and devils left the house, prancing and giggling with their plastic pumpkins filled to the brim.

They were hungry little monsters and couldn't keep their sticky fingers out of their haul, always diving back in for more. Soon enough, their buckets were empty; nothing left but the sticky dark interior begging to be refilled.

The man at the next door praised their outfits and offered them a basket of candies with a smile.

But they didn't want his treats.

Instead, they pounced and dug in with their sharpened claws to get what they wanted.

His sweet meats.

Kai Delmas loves creating worlds, magic systems, and drabbles. Find him on Twitter [@KaiDelmas](https://twitter.com/KaiDelmas).



Wasted Treats by B.J. Thrower

My huge black plastic bowl, in the shape of a grinning pumpkin, was full of unclaimed candy tonight. I sat waiting in the house I couldn't afford, bereft of money, my children, or trick-or-treaters. Ex-husband lied, and his divorce lawyer was better than my legal fool, who was now suing *me*.

But my despair might be diminished by cute kids in costumes, especially the toddlers dressed as flowers or princesses.

My dad's army revolver on the console table was loaded. I picked it up and pointed it at my temple as the doorbell rang, cheery voices calling, "Trick or Treat!"

B. J. Thrower has 37 short fiction sales. Find her on Facebook or at: bjthrower.osfw.online.



Not Home by Bernardo Villela

The Marinos were our neighbourhood not-homes on Halloween. That year'd been tough—the Depression'd bred problems, and we were short on patience.

Rocks at the ready, we'd really punish the Marinos for their latest transgression.

Windows shattered. We climbed in for our treats, finding not tricks, but something far worse.

The Marinos were home—they always were.

We were not the first intruders that night.

The Marinos were dressed to the nines for a masquerade ball. They lay on the cold marble floor, smiles carved into their stomachs, spilling intestines.

Only then did I realise they weren't *hiding* from us.

Bernardo Villela has short fiction included in many periodicals and anthologies. Published poetry and translations.



Legally Dead by Michael Stroh

It's been almost a year since I was declared legally dead. Almost a year of wandering, untethered and formless. Almost a year of being invisible. And rarely, when I am seen, people scream.

One doesn't set out to haunt. Not at first. But invisibility becomes unbearable. To terrify means you exist, at least on some plane.

Today's Halloween. Time is fluid for me, but the costumes gave it away.

I walk among them all night, but no one notices me.

Then, a growl behind me. A Rottweiler, drool dripping from bared teeth.

"Hey boy," I say, kneeling. "You see me."

Michael Stroh is a pastor and writer in the Dallas area. He likes brevity.



True Halloween

by Austin Wilson

Pipes, roots, and building foundations receded as he fell away from town. Somehow he saw through it all. The blazing pentagram circled downtown. He'd placed the last Jack-o'-lantern, completed the star. The earth opened.

Wind ripped his rubber werewolf face away. Trick-or-treaters screamed in the darkness nearby and a ragged slab of pavement shot past him.

He spun and faced the void. Light flickered below him. Heat rose, his clothes smoked. Wind pushed water from his eyes as the flames tore his flesh, carved it until his teeth seemed to curve up toward his ears.

Finally, the first true Halloween.

Austin Wilson writes comic book and prose fiction and idolizes Ray Bradbury and Nora Ephron.



Pumpkin Patch by Gully Novaro

Your pumpkins are plump this year. Was it worth it?

You don't believe in demons—you think it was a dream. And yet you have nightmares every other night. Those children are missing, after all.

But no, just a dream. There is no pumpkin demon and no bodies under your pumpkin patch. You have never signed that pact.

You pick up one of your treasured pumpkins, it's heavier than it looks. You grab your knife, cut off the top.

The putrid smell of rotten flesh hits your nose as your pumpkin bleeds.

You can't sell these.

Was it worth it?

Gully Novaro is a non-binary writer from Argentina who loves dark tales. Twitter: [@GullyNovaro](https://twitter.com/GullyNovaro)



Devil's Shadow

by Sean M. Palfrey

I couldn't take my eyes off that shape. Backlit by the moon, its sinister silhouette stretched across the land towards me, the wind carrying its foul sulphurous breath.

I tried to stay hidden behind the short wall of the churchyard. I didn't want it to notice me. I had to get home somehow.

Something moved beside my foot, and I stepped back sharply.

Only a mouse.

I swallowed hard, then crept back slowly and exhaled. It was finally gone.

Relieved, I sank back against the wall and looked up at the old crumbling church. It stared right back at me.

Sean M. Palfrey is a multi-media artist, musician and writer from Lincoln, UK.

www.imagomortis.co.uk



Animation by Jacek Wilkos

“All done. How do you like it?”
“It’s great! Looks so real.” The kid ran happily to the rest of the playing children.

It’s the last one. Every child at the Halloween party had a scary spider or a bat painted on their face.

Nicole packed her paints and brushes and took the suitcase to the car.

She returned with a small book in hand. She opened it on the marked page, read the spell, and watched the children scream and run in panic as the animals painted on their faces came to life.

“Now that’s what I call animation.”

Engineer, husband, father of two daughters. Writes horror micro-fiction. Loves everything that’s scary and dark. [@Jacek.W.Wilkos](#)



Pumpkin Seeds

by Corinne Pollard

Madre said her recipe keeps evil spirits away, as long as I drink her special *queimada*.

My job was to peel the pumpkin's insides, squishing the lumpy flesh between my fingers until it was hollow. Madre filled it with unknown herbs and recited her mumbo jumbo.

The drink steamed at completion, but my boyfriend had been distractingly texting me.

The *queimada* slithered my throat roughly, like fingernails grasping for a hold to stop the descent.

Madre shrieked something about no seeds, but too late. My stomach absorbed it.

The vines crept upwards and sprouted out of my mouth, seeking sunshine.

Twitter: [@CorinnePWriter](https://twitter.com/CorinnePWriter)



Scenic Route by Rachel L. Tilley

I take the same group to the pumpkin carving festival every year.
Down the valley, round the cliffs.

Today, my mind is preoccupied.

A tap, tap of falling rain. A drip, drip of falling blood.

A knife, which clatters, then lies still; the hand from which it fell, now lifeless.

Only as my spirit rises, do I see clearly. Death brought no release. My imagined demons are still pursuing me—except now, nobody is driving the bus. The passengers begin rising up in panic...but cannot prevent the vehicle toppling.

Pumpkins' guts splash everywhere. Or, more accurately, pumpkins *and* guts.

Rachel L. Tilley writes short stories in the fantasy and horror genres. [@rachelltalley](https://twitter.com/rachelltalley)



My Secret

by Christopher Wood

I'm not ascaresd. Daddy says they're only words in my head. They can't hurt me if I don't tell anyone. All the childrens get them now but only the tattle-tales don't get to stay home.

Eric telled what he heard in his head, and Daddy locked him in the basement. I heard Eric's screams and mommy crying, saying she couldn't do it no more. I only seen Eric one more time, when Daddy dragged him to the van. He was changed. Not Eric.

Mommy and daddy are asleep.

I hope they can't hear me.

I have a secret to tell.

Christopher Wood lives in the UK and writes speculative fiction. He is on Twitter [@chriswood01](https://twitter.com/chriswood01)



The Catch

by Chelsea Pumpkins

Under the cover of clouds, the darkest hour of night, I reel in my line. The creature doesn't thrash, but rises serenely from the lake, its slick body humming. Three deep eyes adorn its face, reflecting my stare, each its own impossible shade of amber. A godlike voice speaks.

Swallow me whole.

I slice the corners of my lips with my fishing knife and crack the hinges of my jaw. Wide enough. I slip the creature into my mouth, down my throat.

With legs and lungs, I walk the earth, for now that I have been consumed, my ruin begins.

Read Chelsea Pumpkins' stories in anthologies [Chromophobia](#) and [Bloodless](#), and follow her on Twitter [@ChelseaPumpkins](#).



Last Wish

by Vijayaraj Mahendraraj

“It grants your deepest desires,” chuckled the wizened shaman.
“This is it?” pressed Arthur, nervously eyeing the shrivelled severed hand in the box.

“Mortuk the magician’s hand. Preserved for centuries. Now yours, on All Hallows’ Eve. Wish well.”

Arthur was soon speeding away, sealed box upon his lap. His restless mind pondered wish after wish—endless possibilities.

Prying back the lid eagerly, he cursed. *Empty.*

“Lying codger! I wish death upon—”

The tight grip stifled his words. Long black nails dug deep into his bleeding throat. The car swerved violently into the underbrush to the echoes of the shaman’s laughter.

Passionate writer. Published in Year Four DM Anthology and Grimdark ***

Anthology with BHP. Twitter: [@vijayaraj613](https://twitter.com/vijayaraj613)



The Hunger

by Brett Mitchell Kent

Neon lights strobe in time with the music. Steady bass vibrates my body as I light the fuse for the pyrotechnics on the stage. The guitarist shreds the finale, sending the sold-out crowd wild.

As though we'd timed it, he holds the final chord. My flames illuminate the back of the club. Sparks fly, the crowd roars.

Beauty.

It takes too long for anyone to notice.

They can't see through the smoke.

Can't breathe.

Everyone races to the door at once.

Bodies stack, blocking exits.

The screams.

My flames take them all.

Reducing their bodies to ash—feeding my hunger.

Horror writer Brett Mitchell Kent lives in northern Indiana with his husband and daughters.



The Playdate

by Brett Mitchell Kent

My phone sings into the dark room, screen throwing angular shadows.
I bolt upright, heart pounding.

2:35a.m.

I squint against the brightness.

Motion detected: Front Door.

I click into the grainy video revealing three figures, glowing eyes staring into the outside camera.

“Come play with us,” they say.

“What the hell? It’s the middle of the night. Go away.”

“Come play.”

I silence my phone, set it facedown, and lie facing the wall.

The floorboards creak behind me. I tense.

Turning, I squint against the brightness.

Their glowing eyes throw angular shadows over the room...

“Play with us.”

...Over me.



Horror writer Brett Mitchell Kent lives in northern Indiana with his husband and daughters.



Samhain Seedlings by Kimberly Rei

The girls giggled as they gathered in the square. The entire village turned out for Samhain festivities and the girls were hoping to find husbands.

Alice felt in her pockets for the hempseeds. They'd wait til dusk when the Veil started to fade. Everyone vibrated with anticipation.

The light faded and torches were lit. Alice waited until her friends had all thrown and peered coyly over their shoulders. She took a deep breath, pulled out her seeds and tossed them into the gloaming.

She turned. Burning eyes watched her. The black shape of a demon bowed low.

She was betrothed.

Kimberly Rei likes to write spooky tales that make you look over your shoulder.



Halloween Baby

by Ann Wuehler

Johnny spurted into the open cavity of the dead fox, his seed mingling with entrails and blood.

He waited; the big orange pumpkin of a moon overhead apt for Halloween.

A mist rose from the fox's innards. Small fingers pushed through the coils and loops, and a head as bald as a rotted egg crowned. A cry of anger smacked Johnny's ears.

He squatted by the dead animal, yanked his promised child free of its womb.

Celia would have her child.

The baby stared at him intently, suddenly biting him, then sucking up the blood.

Johnny took it home, anyway.

Ann Wuehler, a writer from Eastern Oregon with soon to be five novels to her name.



Nobody Knows by McKenzie Richardson

“They found a real dead body in the haunted house last year,” Danny said. “Everyone thought it was a decoration until it started to reek. Nobody knows how it ended up there.” He took Alice’s hand, knowing the effect such a story had on teenage girls.

Danny led Alice to the secluded room at the back of the house where the seniors hooked up.

As he stepped inside, something hard smashed against his temple. He turned to find Alice holding a baseball bat.

“What the hell?”

“You said nobody knows how the body got here.” Alice grinned. “But I do.”

McKenzie Richardson works as a librarian by day and a spinner of nightmares by night. www.craft-cycle.com



New-Age Dragon by Christopher Wood

Y our thousands of followers—acolytes—watch, repeating the incantation posted onscreen. They expect nothing, as always. A bit of fun. You recite from the grimoire sent by a fan “*Potestas tenebrarum, corpus draconis*,” and cast the final tokens into the garden firepit at your feet: ecdysis snakeskin and desiccated antirrhinum majus.

Nothing.

Then the flames sputter out. Tendrils of smoke engulf; you inhale in a single breath. The world watches, amused and disbelieving, as your body distorts; horns and scaled talons sprout from beneath flesh sloughing from bones.

Your rebirth.

Leathered wings lift you above houses.

Flames cleanse your path.

Christopher Wood lives in the UK and writes speculative fiction. He is on Twitter [@chriswood01](https://twitter.com/chriswood01)



Hot Tamales by W. Ed George

U mbrage inducing misappropriated culture;
hot as Hades, sweetness under fire.

One pack, one match, they become a pyre.

Sugar: nature's accelerant

for the Hobby Shop that busted me shoplifting a Hot Wheel!

for a school that suspended me *seven times*!

for the forest I couldn't go camping in!

for *their* verdant neighbourhood tucked safely across the tracks!

Pyromania: complex illness.

Who would have guessed a sweet tooth factors in?

My profiler, but only *after the fact*

and all she cares about is lighting up cable news as Halloween looms.

While I burn

in jail

for Hot Tamales.

Sweetness and fire.

W. Ed George is a recovering journalist who resides in a haunted house in Central California.



Grinning Jack

by Wondra Vanian

The jack-o'-lantern was smiling, which was weird because Zach *definitely* remembered carving a scowl onto its face.

“Hey, mom? Did you put a new jack-o'-lantern outside?” he asked, unable to take his eyes off the smiling pumpkin.

He heard his mother sigh from the hallway. “*When* would I have time to carve a jack-o'-lantern, Zach?” she asked, sounding harassed. “I work two jobs just to...”

Zach tuned her out as he stared at the grinning gourd on the porch. It creeped him out. He had just about decided to smash it when the damn thing turned and *winked* at him.

Wondra Vanian lives in the UK with her partner and their mischief of sausage dogs.



Hallowed Fog

by Laura Nettles

The fog seeps from the graves, cloaking tombstones in ethereal shrouds. Soil softened by the tears of the living left behind shifts, apparitions emerging as the veil between worlds thins. The dead move, forms suspended in the wafting water particles, searching for their relatives.

“Mom, who are they?” asks the little girl dressed as a witch.

Mrs Catermyer hurries her daughter along the sidewalk outside the cemetery. Her dead husband will not reach them on this side of the Christian fence—reach out and drag her to the plot she put him in prematurely. Twice.

“Just eat your candy, dear.”

Laura Nettles pens terror by moonlight in Toronto, Canada. Follow her journey at lauranettles.com.



Monkey Arms by Dawn DeBaal

Donna was a hirsute girl—the hair on her arms was long and black. We called her “monkey arms” all through grade school. She was embarrassed and wore sweaters, even in hot weather. I felt terrible for her. Kids could be so cruel.

Halloween, full moon, and puberty happened all on the same night. One minute Donna was running in her Wonder Woman costume, the next, she was on her knees, writhing in pain.

“What’s wrong?” Coming closer, I screamed. Donna wasn’t “monkey arms” any more. She had morphed, evolving into a werewolf.

Terrified, we ran away, leaving her behind.

Dawn DeBaal has over 500 published pieces to her credit and still wants more!
linktr.ee/dawndebral



The Widowmaker **by Bernardo Villela**

The author gave out books, not candy. Barney went there because he liked books. His friends joined him on the off chance the author's wife might give them mints.

The wife was on the porch. Alone.

"Trick or treat!" they said, muted.

Books and candy galore were laid out.

"One book, one candy," she said morosely.

"Sorry, boys. Harold passed. He'd want me to do this still."

The others rushed, Barney browsed.

One spine felt like—

"Skin."

Her eyes bugged seeing what he'd picked.

"That shouldn't— That book killed him!"

"So, I'll take it."

Grimoire in hand, Barney was pleased.



Bernardo Villela has short fiction included in many periodicals and anthologies. Published poetry and translations.



Fangs by S.C. Morgan

“Want to see them?”
Becca smiled with a shrug before nodding.

Extending his hand, a pair of fangs rested on Eric’s palm; one tiny dot of crimson marring their pristine white finish.

“For the Halloween party next weekend?”

With a wicked grin, he slid the fangs into his mouth and smiled, revealing the fangs in all of their glory.

“Oh, those do look good.”

“Do they?” Eric chuckled as he drew closer.

“Oh my!”

He nuzzled up to her, placing kisses along her neck before drawing the fangs along her jawline, leaving goosebumps in their wake.

“Don’t you dare stop.”

S.C. Morgan spends his nights putting pen to paper, bringing imagination to life. Twitter:
[@SCMorganAuthor](https://twitter.com/SCMorganAuthor)



Clingy

by Andreas Flögel

When Alan saw her on the dance floor, he could hardly contain his anger.

She had followed him again.

At least the long white dress and her greyish complexion made her blend in with the costumed crowd.

He grabbed her arm forcefully.

“How dare you? What are you doing here?”

She smiled faintly.

“It is Halloween. You are not the only one who likes to party and have fun. Come on, dance with me.”

“Never! It is over! Accept it! It is ‘till death do us part,’ and it was more than two weeks ago that I killed you.”

Andreas Flögel publishes speculative fiction and more mostly in German magazines and anthologies.

Website: <https://drdings.wordpress.com/>



It's Here!

by Karen Thrower

The day has come for us to become one with our true selves.
All year we yearn for the fires in the jack-o'-lanterns that keep us safe from
ghostly waifs.

Halloween, glorious, heavenly Halloween!

The cold air, crunching of leaves agree with us.

The smell of pumpkin and candied nuts excites us.

When we hear a wail from the thinning veil, we shake in fear (or
excitement?)!

Do we dress up and hunt for candy, or do we go out with Auntie and call
forth the spirits?

Halloween, All Saints' Day, or All Hallows' Eve—

Our favourite day is here!

Karen Thrower is a native Oklahoman, wife, and mother to a rambunctious eight-year old.
[@maisery9](#)



Trapped by Stephen Herczeg

They said it would be fun. It was my first time. They said we'd get up to mischief on our special night. The night when households were asked *Trick or Treat*. No treats, we would deliver tricks.

We didn't care about the treats. This was our night to enjoy ourselves. The night the veil between worlds comes down. The night we demons are free to walk the Earth once more.

We had so much fun. Tricked everyone...but I forgot to go back.

Now I'm trapped. With *humans*. These horrible humans.

I'm scared. I want to go back to Hell.

Stephen Herczeg writes many genres, and drinks from the well of the Hell Hare continuously.



Oompa-Loompas by W. Ed George

Fat shamer, fat shamer
Buckety-foo!

I've racked some hollow tipped treats for you

Why do you care that I guzzle down sweets?

Or get diabetes and elephant feet?

Surely your house is sugary glass

Perhaps I'll try some when I next pass

Or raid your kitchen for those steak knives on racks

Just in case you return mid ransack

Help (like diets) won't save the day

On Halloween night when tricksters hold sway

Don't like the look of me?

Can't help but stare?

Dressed as Shrek or Big Bird

I'll lurk, you'll know not where

Trick? treat? Lead to eat!

W. Ed George is a recovering journalist who resides in a haunted house in Central California.



Smart Car by Brett Mitchell Kent

One-hundred-five kph, one-twenty.

I slam my foot on the brake pedal full force to no effect, weaving around the few cars not keeping pace.

The power button sticks; car accelerates.

I recall advice I'd read and throw the car into neutral, zooming past a dead-end sign.

Other drivers' panicked faces peer wide-eyed from their cars, matching or exceeding my speed.

One-sixty-five.

Blinking away tears, I punch the dash.

"Car. Power down," I plead with the voice control system. "Power down!"

One-eighty.

One-ninety.

I veer around a fiery crash—narrowly.

Two-hundred-five.

“Goodbye, Michael,” the tinny voice says before impact.



Horror writer Brett Mitchell Kent lives in northern Indiana with his husband and daughters.



Take One

by Blaise Langlois

“The number one rule to follow is to only take one,” Jenna’s sister had warned. Jenna laughs, thinking about it, as she mounts the steps of the old Victorian at the end of her street. It’s just after 9 p.m., and most trick-or-treaters have already retired for the evening. The bowl on the porch is clearly marked with those simple instructions. Looking around, Jenna estimates she is the last one out at this hour. *Surely, nothing would be missed*, she thinks. The bowl is overflowing. She quickly drops a candy into her bag and reaches for another.

Something reaches back.

Author and poet, Blaise Langlois, never turns down the chance to tell a spooky story.
<https://ravenfictionca.wordpress.com/>



Sinful SMile by Brianna Witte

The revolt spread through the burning city, the American people taking out their anger on anyone within striking distance. Gunfire erupted from all corners as people slaughtered each other in the streets. A mix of blood and guts soaked the pavement as bodies piled on top of each other. Those who were alive slashed and shot their way to their next victim, their costumes giving them the feeling of invincibility as they continued their killing spree.

Yet the jack-o'-lantern was unharmed, the candlelight spilling from its lips. Its chilling smile lit the night as chaos reigned its terror over humanity.

*Brianna Witte is the author of "Witches and Vampires" a fast-paced, fantasy adventure novella.
Instagram: [@briannawitteauthor](https://www.instagram.com/briannawitteauthor)*



Third Eye

by Warren Benedetto

Seamus put down the meth pipe, then leaned closer to the mirror and gently prodded the thumb-sized lump on his forehead. He recoiled in horror.

The lump was...moving. There was something inside, under the skin. Something *alive*.

Seamus imagined burrowing mealworms, or explosions of baby spiders. Whatever was in there, he had to get it out.

He gripped the razor blade and drew it horizontally across the lump. The skin parted wetly, revealing a bloodshot sclera and a pale blue iris.

Seamus groaned. He couldn't be seen with three eyes. He would need to cut one out.

But which?

Warren Benedetto writes short fiction about horrible people doing horrible things.
www.warrenbenedetto.com



Bloody Buddy

by Darlene Holt

Buddy was preparing for his biggest Halloween performance yet. But what mask to choose? Most clowns just wore makeup. A wig. Red nose. But Buddy was different. He liked to bring his audience into the act.

He paced the butchery, the farmer's mask gently swaying from its hook at his passing. Too rural. Farther down, the doctor? Too serious. He's a clown, after all. But the painter? Yes. He slipped the face over his own, stretching the flesh beneath his chin as he contemplated his reflection in the steel hook. Red-stained speckles streamed across a permanent look of horror. Perfect.

Darlene Holt is a writer, editor, and educator from California, where she enjoys writing horror stories.



Pumpkin Head

by Vijayaraj Mahendraraj

Such sweet scents. Every inhalation was a golden breath of mirth. Hearty laughter and merriment were enveloped by yellow mists. The alchemists delivered perpetual glee.

The young boy's eyes were glazed, his mind addled. Amidst the euphoric fog, he spotted a beacon of wonder.

A pumpkin head.

The pulsing brilliance within accentuated its crooked eyes and widening maw. Eagerly, he rummaged. The sweets were stubborn, but he tugged relentlessly until they came loose. He tried one, then retched violently. Briefly, the mists dissipated. Quivering, he glimpsed rotting teeth in his palm and glanced down.

It was not a *pumpkin* head.

Passionate writer. Published in Year Four DM Anthology and Grimdark Anthology with BHP.
Twitter: [@vijayaraj613](https://twitter.com/vijayaraj613)



Pumpkin Carving

by Andreas Flögel

Midnight was long gone, the sky moonless and dark. I was slumped on my porch, where I had dozed off after one too many beers, surrounded by pumpkin scraps—remnants of my carving attempts.

Flickering candlelight from the pumpkin face. Restless shadows on the wall.

I was struggling but could not get free. The urge to scream for help rose in me, but I dared not. My eyes were glued to the tip of the blade dangling in the air, faltering just in front of my face.

In my head, the pumpkin's hollow voice: "You started with the eye gouging."

Andreas Flögel publishes speculative fiction and more mostly in German magazines and anthologies.

Website: <https://drdings.wordpress.com/>



Midnight Gala by Fariel Shafee

The music starts at midnight. Golden light floods the ballroom. Fresh white lilies emanate sweet, mild aromas. The house is bustling with people in gorgeous satin gowns and suits.

Outside, the jungle is dark. Vixen howl.

The baroness kisses her lover in the bedroom upstairs. He embraces her, and she takes off her gown. Her body is white like chalk. Her lips are red like blood. His fingers are long and thin. The lovers have only hours before the mansion crumbles into dust.

The ghosts will disappear when the sun is up, and the vixen will prowl in the ruins.

Fariel Shafee has recently published in Black Ink Fiction and Nordic Press anthologies.



The Jack-o'-Lantern by Bernardo Villela

The kids better appreciate this, Herman thought, as he finished this year's jack-o'-lantern.

Scalpel in hand, he ruminated on how jack-o'-lanterns were scarier as turnips. This was going above and beyond and he relished it.

Peeling the scalp off the specimen, hair and all, he knew this would be his best work. Herman's choice liked tanning beds in moderation so, after plying the man with alcohol and carrots, his coloration was perfect.

Seeing the man's head now he could almost forget all the screaming, the grueling amputations, all the blood.

Placing it on his porch he anticipated the children's screams.

Bernardo Villela has short fiction included in many periodicals and anthologies. Published poetry and translations.



Hollow Eyes

by Sean M. Palfrey

I think we all miss those crisp, autumnal mornings of childhood. Especially the ones that fall during the first break from school in October. There's just enough daylight to make playing out worthwhile, and all the fields are freshly ploughed, waiting to be explored.

We'd often find old horseshoes, flint arrowheads, and bits of pottery. But there was that one time—that early morning when the sun had just come up. Our last day off before school. And we saw it staring up at us from the dirt. Lifeless, gaunt, its eyes pecked away by crows. But staring, nonetheless.

Sean M. Palfrey is a multi-media artist, musician and writer from Lincoln, UK.
www.imagomortis.co.uk



Fetish

by A. Lily

My neighbour, Brian, is a strange one. He collects shoes. They're stored in the tuff shed behind his trailer and sometimes they scream in a tone so deep, it bangs in your chest. At night he'll insert an arm into a shoe and stroke himself. Starting with his face then finishing as he reaches the apex of his hips. I'm a light sleeper and instantly wake up at the closing of the sliding glass door as Brian steps out at three in the morning for this ritual.

I know how he gets these shoes. That secret is safe with me.

A. Lily resides in the mountains where she makes ritual sacrifices for nightmares to write down.



Dress Up

by Darlene Holt

You find it fun to dress up one day a year. A monster, devil, witch. What you don't know is I like to dress up too. A player on your little league team. A dancer in your ballet recital. The "new kid" in your class. I befriend you. Lure you. Together, we play beneath the metal playground slide, away from prying eyes. We dig in the sand like kids do, and dig and dig until the portal appears. Your eyes grow large at the swirling reds and blacks below. Ghostly hands reach out, fingers lingering. Forgotten souls. Gullible. Like you.

Darlene Holt is a writer, editor, and educator from California, where she enjoys writing horror stories.



Dead End

by Chelsea Pumpkins

Recalculating.

Recalculating.
You frown at the screen but follow its directions anyway—a left turn onto a route you don't recognise.

Recalculating.

Again?

A turn. A fork. Another turn. A deserted four-way stop.

Recalculating.

The road winds around the mountain ahead. You climb. The engine revs. The road drops off on your right, narrower with every turn.

You have reached your destination.

You stop on the small, dusty shoulder.

You step over the dented guardrail and teeter on the edge of the precipice.

Your destination.

Not the end of the road, but the end of yours.

Eyes closed, you let go.



Read Chelsea Pumpkins' stories in anthologies [Chromophobia](#) and [Bloodless](#), and follow her on Twitter [@ChelseaPumpkins](#).



Always Passing **by Benny Sabbatelli**

It takes Mary a long time to scoop out the pumpkin. It takes even longer to carve it. Then longer to set up the Halloween party decorations. And longer to decide what costume she's going to wear. Then it takes ages for her first guests to arrive. But then it doesn't take long at all for her to sink her first drink. Even less time to sink her second. And less time for her to be passed out in the garden. Then just minutes for him to find her. But the police never find who hung her on the tree.

Benny Sabbatelli is a British Italian horror author with a passion for humanity horror.



Sending Hugs **by Warren Benedetto**

I'm behind you.
Can you feel me?

Can you feel my hands slipping under your arms?

My breath caressing the back of your neck?

My arms tightening around your torso?

It's getting harder to breathe, isn't it?

Try.

See?

Your chest feels too small. Your lungs are constricted.

And yet still I hold you tighter. Closer.

Pain knives through your body as your ribs break, one at a time.

You try to scream, but you can't draw a breath. The agony is too intense.

Your vision goes soft and grey, then black.

My lips graze your ear, whispering.

“Good night.”



Warren Benedetto writes short fiction about horrible people doing horrible things.

www.warrenbenedetto.com



Sweet Thing by Gabriella Balcom

“Give me a minute,” Grandpa said.

“I can’t,” Mylie replied. She’d been anticipating the church Halloween party for weeks and didn’t want to be late. “You don’t have to drive me. It’ll be faster if I just go through the woods.”

SHE’D BARELY STARTED down the path when she heard a noise.

A black kitten stood nearby, mewing.

“You sweet thing,” Mylie cooed, picking it up. It purred but bit her. “Ow!”

After she set it down, she noticed a second. A third appeared, then others, and they surrounded her.

She giggled, then screamed when they closed in on her.

Gabriella Balcom writes fantasy, horror, romance, and sci-fi, and has 347 works accepted for publication. Facebook: [@GabriellaBalcom.lonestarauthor](https://www.facebook.com/GabriellaBalcom.lonestarauthor)



Helpful Professions by Jacek Wilkos

Rumours say ghosts appear in our town at Halloween. Some say they see their deceased friends or family walking on the town square or main street, then vanishing around a corner. They try to catch up with them but are unable to find them.

I'm the only one who knows the truth.

At Halloween, I find my victim, put on a prepared mask, wait for eye contact, then disappear into an alley. There, I take off my costume. The look of their faces always gives me great satisfaction.

My professions are also very helpful: I'm a taxidermist and a gravedigger.

Engineer, husband, father of two daughters. Writes horror micro-fiction. Loves everything that's scary and dark. [@Jacek.W.Wilkos](#)



Evening Swim by Brett Mitchell Kent

The pool called to her on the unseasonably hot Halloween evening.
Swim, Michele. Cool off.

She staggered through her sliding glass door, peeling off her tight cocktail dress, steadying herself on the porch railing to pluck a strappy heel off each foot.

Hiccups wracked her chest.

In a bra but no panties, she slipped through the steam rolling over the pool's surface.

The water hugged her tightly, too tightly. She kicked away, her muscles unusually slow and unresponsive with drink.

She hiccupped a lungful of chlorine.

The pool kept her on that unseasonably hot Halloween evening.

Stay, Michele. Don't go.

Horror writer Brett Mitchell Kent lives in northern Indiana with his husband and daughters.



Slay Ride by Don Money

“Call them and see where they are,” Martin says.

I select Danny’s name in my contacts. He picks up on the second ring.

“John,” Danny says. “Where the hell are you guys? Y’all never showed, and the wagon pulled out twenty minutes ago. It’s just me and Pete on the ride.”

I look at the sign in the ground next to the hay wagon where Martin and I sit with other kids from school. “I hate to break this to you, but we are sitting on the Turner’s Haunted Hayride.”

Silence from Danny, and then I hear his screaming start.

Don Money writes Halloween stories from the dark recesses of his evil pumpkin patch. Twitter:
[@donmoneywriting](https://twitter.com/donmoneywriting)



Scaring Crows by Brett Mitchell Kent

They watch from the cornfields, dark eyes in the day reflecting the moon's rays in the night.

More come daily, stealing corn, leaving behind their sticky mucus.

Closer and closer they draw. Fear blooms inside of me, ever present.

Ever growing.

Taunting shadows dance across the field as *they* circle the skies above.

One lands on my shoulder.

Another.

All.

They tear at my sinewy muslin, stealing my straw and shredding me painfully piece by piece.

As always, the farmer comes. He stitches and stuffs, hanging me back on my mount.

They watch, eager to begin again with my end.

Horror writer Brett Mitchell Kent lives in northern Indiana with his husband and daughters.



Nigrum Leporem **by Andrew Anderson**

The gang watched from the alley; they were waiting for a kid out on their own, an easy target. They were about to give up and go to the arcade when a short figure in a black homemade costume shuffled past them—he seemed to be alone.

“Look at that little weirdo!”

“What a lame costume! Hares are brown, and have two eyes, not three.”

“But look—he has a full treat bucket.”

Billy, as de facto leader of the gang, approached the figure and grabbed the costume’s long ears.

The black hare grinned at Billy, his razor-sharp fangs bared.

Andrew Anderson (he/him) is a writer of fiction from Bathgate, Scotland. Twitter: [@soorploom](https://twitter.com/soorploom)



Tom Cat by Ria Rees

I cross another day from the damp pages of my calendar. Sitting on the creaky steps of my crumbling home, I munch on foraged nuts and yoghurt—homemade, naturally.

Tom Cat skulks over, begging for scraps, just like every other morning. “I got nothing, buddy,” I croon, scratching him behind his ear. “All the tins are gone. You ate the last one.”

I show him the empty tin of salmon, as if he’ll understand. “See?”

A low gurgling in the distance, and the unmistakable ring of a tin can alarm. I reach for my shotgun.

“No rest for the living.”

Ria writes from her cottage in Wales, praying that her creations never become sentient.
<https://www.riarees.com/>



A Fog

by Sean M. Palfrey

A thick fog was beginning to spill onto the shore, carried by the encroaching tide. I still had a way to go yet. Usually I took the cliff path, but today I wanted to feel the soft sand give way beneath me. Perhaps pick up a shell or two? But not now.

The fog was creeping across the outstretched curve of the beach, reducing my visibility until I couldn't see a thing.

It was then I tripped over it.

Driftwood? No.

Soft and fleshy. Gasping. Crawling from the water. Hideous.

I froze as it reached its clawed hand towards me.

Sean M. Palfrey is a multi-media artist, musician and writer from Lincoln, UK.

www.imagomortis.co.uk



Toothy Grins by Eric A. Clayton

In the year's waning months, lost spirits return.
They coalesce, stuttering lights, desperate to anchor anew in the cooling earth. Thus begins the ritual.

I lead them among tangling vines, cascading orange. By week's end, each has chosen.

I am meticulous in my task: scooping, hollowing, scraping, carving real emotion. In each fruit, an unlit candle.

The sputtering spirits settle within, casting their soft glow upon the world.

They are content.

Those toothy grins, though, reflect momentary joy before weeks of inevitable decay.

The magic's cost? The disparity between bliss and agony.

Still, the spirits return, believing it all worthwhile.

Eric A. Clayton writes spiritual nonfiction and speculative fiction. Follow his writing at ericclaytonwrites.com.



Birthright

by Ngo Binh Anh Khoa

When young, I'd often watch my father shed his disguise and lead the hunt for mortal flesh, returning at dawn with fur bathed in his prey's blood, his games stacked up for a feast.

How I wanted to be like him, claiming my birthright with the full moon's blessing. My blood, however, remained dormant as time passed, which doused the pride in my father's eyes, leaving them darkened with disdain.

This year was it.

Now, I'm ahead of the pack, still trapped within the fragile flesh of man, as my younger cousins give chase, all hungry for their first kill.

Ngo Binh Anh Khoa is a teacher in Vietnam. Find him on Facebook: [@khoa.ngo.5059](https://www.facebook.com/khoa.ngo.5059).



Troller's Gill

by S. Jade Path

Beware of Troller's Gill. Beware the Barghest that lies within.

Lured, you see, to banish the beast. I went forth, armed with the folly and hubris of youth. And paid the price.

I gathered my ritual tools and set off for its lair. The beast answered my magics, dark fur gleaming, red eyes glowing balefully. I knew fear then. I felt my magics falter and fail.

It leapt and I ran—too slow, too late. Its paw tore open my chest. I drew my last breaths, its dark magic searing my wounds.

Beware the gill of the limestone hill.

S. Jade Path has a penchant for strolling amongst demons and forging shadows into fiction.

linktr.ee/SJadePath



Hungry Things by Alden Terzo

Timmy pulled the covers up and stared at the sliver of light coming in under the door, trying desperately to will it into his dark bedroom.

His parents had decided that he should be able to sleep alone without a nightlight. His mother had told him how proud she was when he'd reluctantly agreed.

It wasn't the dark that Timmy was afraid of, it was the things that slithered out of the dark. Hungry things. But he wanted to make his mother proud. So, when something cold and wet grabbed his ankle, he didn't scream.

Not even when it tugged.

*Alden Terzo writes about disquieting things he glimpses out of the corner of his eye. Twitter
[@AmbassadorAlden](https://twitter.com/AmbassadorAlden)*



Hayride

by John A. McColley

I don't know why I can't give hayrides. Mr Thomas does it every year and everyone has to wait their turn. I have my tricycle and my wagon. I filled it with grass, and everything.

But Mommy saw Danny give me a quarter to ride, and she got mad. She screamed. People give Mr Thomas dollars to ride in *his* wagon. They ride around and laugh.

I got to go last year. I saw just how Mr Thomas does it. I put in grass and bodies... Maybe it has to be real people bodies under the hay, not just squirrels.

John A. McColley writes from his cave in New England. Come visit him at
www.patreon.com/JohnAMcColley



Generations by Michael J. Stiehl

The fly trailed a nervous man into the crypt, both becoming trapped when the door closed. Smelling no food, the fly landed in a dust-choked corner, far from the nearest web.

Producing an iron bar, the man opened the great marble sarcophagus—the lonely crypt’s sole possession—and stared down into its endless black expanse.

The fly, smelling the man’s brow sweat, rubbed its front legs together.

A hand burst from the impossible blackness, breaking the man’s neck. The fly flitted to the corpse as it slumped to the ground, fed, and lay eggs.

It thought nothing of the future.

Michael J. Stiehl lives in Chicagoland where he reads, rides bikes, and obsesses about music.
[@michael.stiehl](https://twitter.com/michael.stiehl)



What Remains?

by Warren Benedetto

Rick empties the gasoline onto the bunk bed, then hurls the empty container against the wall. A drawing of a stick-figure family—a man and woman with two kids—floats in the pool of gas at his feet.

He thinks about his wife, late again, her hair mussed, her lover's cologne lingering on her neck.

He thinks about her car pulling into the driveway, twin car seats in the back, empty.

He thinks about her seeing the flames licking from the bedroom window, realising what he has done.

He thinks about her panic. Her screams.

Then he lights the match.

Warren Benedetto writes short fiction about horrible people doing horrible things.

www.warrenbenedetto.com



I, Hellhound

by K.J. Watson

A goddess snares me.
“Hellhound,” she says. “Your heinous behaviour must cease.”

Never; I resolve as chains bind me underground.

A millennium passes. Above, I hear disciples of the Ancient Ways gather for Halloween. They recite an incantation.

The fetters on my limbs unfasten. The rocks around me move, exposing a shaft. I leap, scramble upwards, and meet the stares of a dozen necromancers.

“We hoped to raise a ghoul,” one says.

“Instead,” I declare, “you have something better. I, Hellhound, will disrupt and devastate on your behalf this All Hallows’ Eve.”

“That’s better than we expected,” comes the reply.

K.J. Watson’s fiction has appeared in comics, magazines and anthologies.



Subjective Art by Sophie Wagner

Mr Thompson had said art is subjective. He told me that every piece is beautiful, and that I needn't worry about the carving project. Yet, somehow, there was a C taped to my pumpkin the next day.

This would not stand.

I slashed and cut, tracing details, scooping out guts when needed, while periodically flipping through my sketchbook.

Once I'd placed a lit candle in the hollowed belly of Mr Thompson, I took a step back. His face bore a toothy smile stretching from ear to ear, and his eyes sat on his head; a design worthy of an A+.

Sophie Wagner is an up-and-coming author with publications from The Macabre Ladies and Iron Faerie!



Smoking Jacket

by Sean M. Palfrey

He stood next to the fireplace in his smoking jacket, his pipe freshly lit and beginning to fill the room with a heavy smoke that accumulated at the ceiling and slowly began to flow downwards as it cooled.

His jacket had been in need of repair for quite some time. The lining was coming away inside, and the stitching needed to be re-sewn in several spots. Even the velvet was wearing away under the arms.

He always wore it, though. Without fail. It was a shame we won't be able to bury him in it. But nothing gets blood out.

Sean M. Palfrey is a multi-media artist, musician and writer from Lincoln, UK.

www.imagomortis.co.uk



Carving Party

by Brett Mitchell Kent

My knife slides easily through the soft flesh, carving two sharp triangles around the eyes. It squelches as I peel the newly freed skin and prop it into the bowl to join the rest.

Delicately, I place the lit tealight into the gaping smile I'd painstakingly carved. The pleasant smell of scorching flesh wafts up to my nostrils. I inhale deeply, savouring it.

I step back to admire my handiwork, smiling widely.

"Now who is next?" I ask, turning to face the rest of the family, bound, gagged, wide-eyed, and crying on the couch. "Mommy looks great now, doesn't she?"

Horror writer Brett Mitchell Kent lives in northern Indiana with his husband and daughters.



Serene

by Lindsay Mansfield

The night is cold, and she is cold, but she doesn't seem to notice.
Her face is serene, and he wonders if she dreams in silence.

She had blamed him. All the late nights and private phone calls, the loss of appetite in both the kitchen and bedroom. She wanted to leave, but he'd always been loyal and solemn to his oath. That was until—

The doctors called it a midlife crisis. The meds did wonders for her, and she now smiled peacefully.

He would get used to sleeping next to her corpse. Not even death would do them apart.

Lindsay Mansfield writes horror and speculative fiction when she's not yelling (loudly) at video games. www.lindsaymansfield.com



Maltesers by W. Ed George

Do they cull millennials with the lethality of gluten or animal proteins?
Is this generation's death cloud spherical and chocolate brown?

Will they TP your house if you drop malt balls into their Hello Kitty bags on Halloween night? Or asphyxiate silently at home, in converted basements, as Dad screws Mom upstairs?

Don't they realise holidays aren't immutable? Don't they feel modern dietary restrictions cloy, like fruit rolls wrapped in cellophane that kills sea turtles? Won't somebody explain why adults approaching thirty should abandon the phrase "trick or treat" forthwith?

Do they ever wonder why their soft hands aren't sticky?

W. Ed George is a recovering journalist who resides in a haunted house in Central California.



Mummy's Boy by Keith R. Burdon

For the first time ever, Stevie's mom had let him go trick or treating on his own. Striding down Maine Street, he felt like the mutt's nuts!

The mutt's nuts... He giggled as he knocked on the door.

"Trick or—"

The words didn't so much as die on his lips as turn around and run in the opposite direction, screaming.

Stevie thought his costume was pretty good, but whatever this person was wearing was something else. The bandages looked totally real. It had to be a costume, didn't it?

"Mummy..." he whispered as the monster's hands reached for him.

Keith R. Burdon enjoys writing and eating cake, but not necessarily in that particular order.



The Promise

by Gabriella Balcom

Sallie trembled, remembering people calling her “ugly” because of her mottled, pockmarked skin, oversized nose, and warts. Only *He* had recognised her inner beauty. Communicating telepathically, He’d sworn to make her outwardly beautiful if she released him from bondage.

Halloween had finally arrived. Studying the moon, she pricked her finger with a knife and chanted the spell He’d taught her.

The ground shook, splitting open. An enormous clawed paw reached out of the crevice. Then *He* emerged in a fiery blaze.

He gestured, and Sallie’s skin darkened, her limbs and body growing until she looked like him.

“Beautiful,” he purred.

Gabriella Balcom writes fantasy, horror, romance, and sci-fi, and has 347 works accepted for publication. Facebook: [@GabriellaBalcom.lonestarauthor](https://www.facebook.com/GabriellaBalcom.lonestarauthor)



Pied Piper by Dawn DeBaal

O*h, the luscious cries of merriment.* Luther stands in the shadows, watching the tikes run, loaded down with their candy bags. The adult far ahead, leading the way for these sweet innocent children lost in the excitement of getting sweet confections.

One of them falls behind. Luther rubs his hands in glee, catching up to the little child, who has skinned their knee.

“Oh, you poor child. Here is a lollipop for you...don’t cry.” It snuffles, takes his offering, as Luther bandages its knee.

“Would you like more candy?” It bobs its head. “Come with me.”

It’s that simple.

Dawn DeBaal has over 500 published pieces to her credit and still wants more!
linktr.ee/dawndebraal



Black Eyes by Jodie Francis

“Trick or treat?” whispered the three children in unison.

“Oh, what lovely costumes, children. What scary black eyes!” exclaimed Mrs Smith, offering candy.

The children didn’t move. Mrs Smith’s eyes were drawn to theirs, feeling sick to her stomach.

“Can we come in?” they asked.

She fell to her knees. The pressure in her head and pain in her chest made her scream. She writhed around on the floor as the children giggled.

“No,” she barely managed to wheeze.

The children smiled.

“Good choice,” said the little girl as they moved to another house in search of their next feed.

Jodie Francis has been published by Black Hare Press, Black Ink Fiction and Paramour Ink.



Something Wicked by Lori Green

Kelsey sat down in the middle of the crude chalk outline, placing a stone at each point of the pentacle, just like in the book. Her eyes drifted to the window, the full moon hanging low in the autumn sky. She took a deep breath and lit the candles, one by one, each casting a warm yellow glow in the darkness, illuminating the words of the spell. Closing her eyes, she whispered the incantation, yet nothing happened.

It was all ridiculous, really. She didn't believe any of it.

Until a cold wind surrounded her, and her body began to rise.

Lori Green is a horror writer walking the fine line between macabre and madness. Twitter:
[@LoriG1408](https://twitter.com/LoriG1408)



Morning Run

by Brett Mitchell Kent

The cold air stung at my eyes as I ran, panting.

Screaming wouldn't help. No one would hear me all the way out here. That's why he brought me. I'm not his first.

Sticks crunched beneath my bare, bloody feet. I could no longer hear his steps pounding behind me, but I pressed on, zigzagging around trees, hoping I'm running in the right direction.

My limbs grew numb from the cold.

I skidded to a stop as I came upon the broken body.

All the time I spent running away, it never occurred to me I might already be dead.

Horror writer Brett Mitchell Kent lives in northern Indiana with his husband and daughters.



Candy Corn by Gully Novaro

Honeyed kisses, smooth as silk, pass down my throat, unchewed.
I sit on the roof of this six-floor building, getting ready for tonight. My hands hold white, yellow, orange, and gold. I'll be the treasure chest.

I love candy corn. I eat it all.

My stomach has swelled. Like a piñata filled with surprises, it's ready to burst.

I love candy corn, it's a gift to the world, and tonight it's my turn to give back. I walk to the edge, look down on the trick-or-treaters...and *jump*.

Belly-up to reveal the prize. I hope they leave candy for everyone.

Gully Novaro is a non-binary writer from Argentina who loves dark tales. Twitter: [@GullyNovaro](https://twitter.com/GullyNovaro)



Annual Marathon by Tiffany Michelle Brown

“**B**reak for snacks?”
“Did you make pumpkin chilli?”

“Of course.”

Jamie hops up before I finish my sentence. Can’t blame him. I make damn good chilli.

“Having fun?” I ask. This year, we’re watching my picks, and I hope I’ve impressed Jamie.

“Very much so.” My crush winks at me. My heart swells.

We return to the living room, balancing bowls of chilli on our laps. I nod at the blood-soaked man in the corner. A chainsaw revs to life.

The man I tied to a chair howls with fear, and I shiver.

We both know how this slasher ends.

Tiffany Michelle Brown is a California-based writer who once had a beer with a ghost.



Childhood Nightmares

by Taryn George

As a child, All Hallows' Eve had simultaneously been my most and least favourite holiday. There was nothing better than unlimited candy and getting into costume, spooky movies on the TV and Mom making hot chocolates.

That was until I saw the movie. You know the one. The one about The Night He Came Home. Michael Myers' masked face had haunted my nightmares for many years.

That was, until I found out there were worse things to fear. The dread running through me now as I watched those four silhouettes draw closer was paralysing on the night they came home.

Taryn George, her cat, Jason, bedside her, writes nightmare fuel from her window seat.



Witch's Brew

by Kai Delmas

Finally, you'll need no more than a sprinkling of salt and a dollop of honey. Go ahead and add a spoonful of cinnamon too for the seasonal spice.

Now pour the bubbling concoction into a hollowed-out pumpkin and let it sit upon your porch. Let the smoky tendrils rise and swirl around the neighbourhood.

Watch as the children drift towards your house, following that wonderful scent of your brew. The promise of something sweet just for them.

I hope you didn't forget to butter your dishes and preheat the oven.

It's almost time for the meat pies to go in.

Kai Delmas loves creating worlds, magic systems, and drabbles. Find him on Twitter [@KaiDelmas](https://twitter.com/KaiDelmas).



It Waits

by Destiny Eve Pifer

Darkness sets in on the small town as kids in various costumes ran from door to door.

Among the crowds, a group of teens made their way towards the old house at the edge of town. A house that no one had entered in over fifty years. A house where blood still caked the walls.

As they climbed the old wooden steps, something within the walls began to stir. Watching from the dark shadows, its hunger began to grow. Like a predator waiting for its prey, it struck and devoured one soul after another.

Through the house, their screams echoed.

Destiny Eve Pifer is a published author whose work has appeared in numerous anthologies.



The Mist

by Ngo Binh Anh Khoa

Mother warned us to never trust the voices from the Mist enveloping our town before she passed away, leaving me alone with my brother.

I lived by those words as I cared for him. But months later, he'd hear a voice calling out to him from beyond our crumbling walls, from beyond the ever-shifting Mist.

"Mother's voice!" he claimed.

I still remember, with haunting clarity, the sight of his tiny back fading into the lifeless greyness.

Now, I can but stare at the two pictures placed side-by-side upon my family's altar, wondering how I still have tears left to shed.

Ngo Binh Anh Khoa is a teacher in Vietnam. Find him on Facebook: [@khoa.ngo.5059](https://www.facebook.com/khoa.ngo.5059).



Stinky Subterfuge

by John H. Dromey

Intended to accelerate a return to normality—despite countless paranormal post-apocalyptic perils—a city ordinance required homeowners to turn on their porch lights and open their doors to trick-or-treaters.

Orville Hix spared no expense on safety precautions. Besides renting a guard dog to sniff out the truly undead, he acquired sharpened wooden stakes for vampires, a handgun with silver bullets for werewolves, etc. Running low on funds, he bought stale candy.

A disappointed youngster returned with an ill-tempered pet skunk. The odoriferous animal sprayed Orville's dog and stank up the place royally.

Sensory overload.

Orville succumbed to a foul-smelling zombie.

John H. Dromey has contributed stories to over twenty Black Hare Press anthologies.



Milk Bowls

by Dorian J. Sinnott

It was Halloween when Harold saw her on the stoop—that skinny black cat with white chest blaze. She circled the lawn, mewling for attention. Food. But Harold waved her off, going about his day. Lighting jack-o'-lanterns for the children Trick-or-Treating at dusk.

He had seen the bowls of milk left on his neighbours' steps. He knew the cat had been well cared for.

But still, she didn't leave. And as the shadow of evening fell upon the town, she continued to sit there. Eyes burning red. Hot hate dripping from her jaws.

Unlike Harold, his neighbours had been wise.

Dorian J. Sinnott's work has appeared in 200+ publications and been nominated for numerous awards. www.doriansinnott.com



Right Size by Don Money

The door flew open, and the man blurted out, “Trick or Treat! smell these feet, then I’ll give you something good to eat.”

He had usurped my line. “You got it wrong, mister, it’s supposed to be, smell *my* feet.”

A devilish smile played behind the grey stringy hair hanging over his face. “No, no, young man, I meant smell these feet.”

From behind his back, he pulled two small feet. Jagged bone poked out through the tops and dried blood stained the skin.

“Hmmm, disregard the food offer,” he said, eyeing my feet. “I don’t have your size yet.”

Don Money writes Halloween stories from the dark recesses of his evil pumpkin patch. Twitter: [@donmoneywriting](https://twitter.com/donmoneywriting)



For Anubis

by Luis Manuel Torres

“What was the cause of death?” asked the sheriff.

“Another OD,” answered the coroner. “Real shame. Sixteen is way too young.” He covered her body and grabbed his clipboard.

The sheriff uncovered her again. “Don’t feel bad. She’s a perfect candidate.”

“You want to mummify her?”

“It’s what Anubis wants.”

“But her family—”

“They don’t know we’ve found her.”

The coroner hesitated.

“What’s with that face, doc? She’s sixteen—better to be given to Anubis than buried in some cemetery.”

The coroner wrote on the clipboard and handed it over. “Jane Doe is all yours.”

“You mean she’s all Anubis’s.”

Luis Manuel Torres, author of [Midnight Animals](#) & [Fox Vision](#). Find him on Wattpad [@lobo1989](#).



Jack

by Andrew Kurtz

It was Halloween, and twelve-year-old Will was dressed to scare—pumpkin mask, black cape, and black top hat.

“Trick or treat,” he said to Mrs Faraday.

“I rarely see anybody dressed as a pumpkin these days,” Mrs Faraday remarked.

“I’m dressed as Jack,” Will corrected.

“As in Jack-o’-lantern?”

“No. Now fill my bag with candy!”

“I’m sorry, I have no candy,” Mrs Faraday said, taken aback.

“Then you get a trick,” Will sneered, brandishing a butcher’s knife and disembowelling the old lady.

As Mrs Faraday’s bloody innards spilled onto the porch, Will muttered, “Jack is short for Jack the Ripper.”

Andrew Kurtz is a short story horror author whose works appear in numerous horror anthologies
linktr.ee/horror672



To Themselves by Fariel Shafee

The ship was rocking like a cradle mid-sea. His breath was soft on Clara's neck.

The lightning flashed at midnight. Someone shrieked. Clara shivered.

“HONEY,” SHE YELLED, waking up alone. No one answered.

He must be in the dining room.

The deck under the sunny morning sky was empty.

“Captain!” She walked up to the bridge.

“Who’s in charge of the ship?” she called, looking around the empty space.

The creature that hugged her from behind was cold and scaly, but she felt Jack’s square cufflinks.

“It’s all ours.” His breath was cold. “Tonight, we shall sail together to Atlantis.”

Fariel Shafee has recently published in Black Ink Fiction and Nordic Press anthologies.



Green Thumb by Brett Mitchell Kent

“**Y**ou’ve got to know which leaves to keep and which to pluck,” the old woman explains, caressing the plant tenderly. “But the most important is knowing exactly when to feed them. And the best food.”

The intoxicating aroma massages my senses, warmth radiating through my body.

“How do you know when and what to feed?”

“Oh, dearest. The plant tells me, of course.”

Chuckling, I inhale deeply for another smell. It snuggles around me like a blanket.

“How long does it take to digest its food?”

She smiles wide.

The plant wraps over my mouth and nose.

“You’ll see, dear.”

Horror writer Brett Mitchell Kent lives in northern Indiana with his husband and daughters.



Skin Mask

by David D. West

Walter slid the knife into the skin just behind the girl's ear. He framed her face, tugging and pulling at the skin to remove it from the skull as delicately as he could.

The last few attempts had been sloppy. Nicks in the cheeks, uneven edges. But this time, his work was flawless. Practice makes perfect.

He placed the dead skin mask over his own face and felt her presence envelop him. Walter became her in that moment, and a smile stretched across his ruby-red painted lips. And on a night like tonight, no one would question his bloody halo.

*David D. West lives and teaches in the Pacific Northwest. Find him on Twitter/Instagram
[@DavidWestWrites](https://twitter.com/DavidWestWrites)*



Unholy Redemption

by Christopher T. Dabrowski

What Adam heard, terrified him. Until then, Daddy had just been a daddy.

But he became suspicious. Adam knew at that moment that Dad was bad.

He'd threatened Mommy with death and used some sort of terrible spell, because instead of being scared, Mom just laughed, encouraging him to hurt her more.

"Honey, I'm about to pull out my magic wand and stick it in you," his father had growled. "Very deep."

"Oh yeah, do it." Mom had moaned, apparently suffering a lot.

On that day, Adam decided when he grew up, he would become a priest.

Fighting against evil.

Christopher T. Dabrowski's books have been published in countries across the globe.



Light Load

by Sophie Wagner

Both men were silent as the truck trundled down the darkened streets of Soho. Trick-or-treaters had long since retired, but the night was still far from over for some.

After parking, the men exited the vehicle, not daring to make eye contact with their boss.

“You’re late,” Mr Greyson remarked. “We’re starving in here.”

Impatiently, he opened the back of the truck and peered inside. From the shadows, twelve bloody and bound humans looked back.

“This load looks light... No matter, though.” His eyes slid to the two men. He licked his lips, fangs glistening. “Why don’t you come inside?”

Sophie Wagner is an up-and-coming author with publications from The Macabre Ladies and Iron Faerie!



Here's Nowhere by Rachel L. Tilley

“Unnatural mist...even for the end of October,” his first mate called as the powdery haze rose up tenaciously from the sea.

But it wasn't mist, nor fog of any sort. It twisted and writhed into shapes—humanesque forms—and Captain Smith soon saw these were the souls of the dead, returning for All Hallows' Eve.

They closed in around the ship, suffocating the crew. Struggling to breathe, gasping desperately, they fell to the deck.

The spirits hoisted the living overboard and commandeered the ship.

The sailors bobbed up and down, as their only means of survival sailed away, irrevocably.

Rachel L. Tilley writes short stories in the fantasy and horror genres. [@rachellttilley](https://twitter.com/rachellttilley)



Haribo Frog by W. Ed George

Clammy prince, mesmerising lover. Once kissed, he denied all further affection until I dissected my own left hand.

“Whose fantasy is this?” I asked, bloody. He answered with cold silence and a darting tongue seeking flies. Our cockeyed love story went viral.

For the record, I’m not (as rumoured) suing. Misanthropic gummies are seldom vanquished in German courts; even the greenest polliwog won’t ribbit. “Dees bulgin’ eyes ain’t seen nuttin’,” they insist, as if coached.

The moral of my mutilation: every table that *can* turn eventually *will*. Upending stereotypes. Exposing scientific crimes. Avenging princely amphibians who are, just now, boiling.

W. Ed George is a recovering journalist who resides in a haunted house in Central California.



Wistman's Wood

by S. Jade Path

The wailing followed her. Haunting...and hunting. Jennie knew better; she really did. What had possessed her to enter Wistman's Wood after dark? She ran, roots seeming to tangle her apurpose, her hands slipping in ancient moss.

She looked behind at the Yeth Hound—Hellish creature of blackest black, trapping souls of children, unborn or unbaptised—gaining ground.

Terrified, Jennie redoubled her efforts to escape the dense trees. Just as the tree line came into sight, the Hound fell upon her, feasting on her young flesh—her very soul.

The following night, a new Hound was coursing through the wood.

S. Jade Path has a penchant for strolling amongst demons and forging shadows into fiction.
linktr.ee/SJadePath



Lantern Jack

by Matt Scott

Lantern Jack hunched under the hood of the SUV but could not find the source of the leak. He cursed the preexisting condition and his all-round lousy luck. There was a costume party to get to, and he didn't want to miss it. He looked up when the sound of an approaching car rustled him from his inspection. No need to worry. He could still make the party. Jack hurried around to the passenger side, grabbing his lantern from beside the bloodied body of his last ride. Holding the lantern high to signal the car, he pulled down his mask.

Matt Scott has published numerous horror stories, collections, and poetry. He lives in Southern Colorado.



Candy Corn by W. Ed George

Sugar, silent slayer.

Sucrose, tincture of fructose and glucose, a scrummy Halloween treat.

Sickness—*our screeching congenital mania!*—spurs us to help it along.

Shaved metal, the adulterant.

Shreds stomach or intestine or colon.

Superior (technically) to blades in the proverbial apple.

Sensory scientists favour Raven Brand—a wax slurry “ginned up” in ’32 with Poe-like preoccupation.

Splendid until sequenced unicorns and sorcerers spat blood, then nevermore.

Soon Grandpa (the sly devil) stole the recipe and injection moulds for sixpence on the pound at liquidation.

Securing a killer cottage industry and our family’s future.

Sweet, sweet Candy Corn.

Sweet screams.

W. Ed George is a recovering journalist who resides in a haunted house in Central California.



Negative Image by Ria Rees

You sit at your desk, scrolling through the hundreds of photos you took up in the mountains last night. Night photography is a gamble at the best of times, and most of the results from yesterday's experiments turned out...so-so.

One stops you in your tracks. You zoom in: a man stands in negative image, as if a light shines from within him. He's smiling.

You skip to the next photo.

He's closer now.

You skip again.

The man continues to approach, grinning at you from the screen.

But you were alone all night.

"Or so you thought."

Behind you.

Ria writes from her cottage in Wales, praying that her creations never become sentient.

<https://www.riarees.com/>



Bloody Mary by Lori Green

She gazed at him across the bar, licking her ruby lips in an open invitation. *Come...* The man stood up, eager to possess her. She sauntered towards the ladies' room and had barely opened the door before he came in behind her, hands fumbling with his zip as he pushed her up against the sink.

Say my name, she silently commanded.

"Mary... Bloody... Mary," he whispered as he thrust into her, now staring vacantly into the mirror as he repeated her name twice more.

He then gaped in horror as blood seeped between her fingers, while she held his still-beating heart.

Lori Green is a horror writer walking the fine line between macabre and madness. Twitter:
[@LoriG1408](https://twitter.com/LoriG1408)



Gargoyle by David D. West

Martin had watched the family for a month. He watched them pick out their Halloween outfits: a shepherdess for the mother, a gargoyle for the father, and a great panda bear for the toddler.

Martin followed behind them, purchasing an identical gargoyle costume. He purchased the same makeup to make sure he was a perfect match for the father.

When Halloween came, Martin followed them at a distance. Waiting.

The parents turned their backs. He stepped forwards, grabbed the toddler's hand, and pushed quickly into the mass of trick-or-treaters.

The toddler followed along, calling him "Daddy" all the way home.

*David D. West lives and teaches in the Pacific Northwest. Find him on Twitter/Instagram
[@DavidWestWrites](#)*



Creature Feature by Dawn DeBaal

It is dark.

Halloween is the one day I can walk in the open, feeling the wind on my face that was melted in a fire. I live for this day each year when I can be myself. Instead of cringing, people give me the thumbs up to the horror they see before them. I am accepted for once, and it makes me smile, which is painful through soldered lips.

I am free until tomorrow when I must go back to hiding my horrid looks.

Then I hear a woman scream as I walk passed—

“Oh, my God. He’s real!”

Dawn DeBaal has over 500 published pieces to her credit and still wants more!
linktr.ee/dawndebral



Window Shopping by Luis Manuel Torres

Dwight and Donna stared at zombie Sarah through the rotating glass doors. Sarah grabbed at them, but the doors were jammed by a mannequin.

“She wouldn’t want to live like that anyway,” said Donna.

“Yeah, b-but she’s my girlfriend,” Dwight stammered.

“God, Dwight! Just let me do it,” Donna barked, snatching the baseball bat from him.

Donna pulled the mannequin out and Sarah fell through. Donna smashed the bat into Sarah’s head. “She was already dead.”

Donna returned her attention to her former friend and began to pull Sarah’s heels off.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m keeping these. They’re fabulous.”

Luis Manuel Torres, author of [Midnight Animals](#) & [Fox Vision](#). Find him on Wattpad [@lobo1989](#).



Gotcha

by James Rumpel

“Earl thought it would be fun,” explained Linda, “to dress like a scarecrow, sit out here, and scare trick-or-treaters.”

“Excuse me,” interrupted the EMT. “From body temperature and early rigor mortis, I estimate he died around two hours ago.”

Linda nodded. “That makes sense. The last kids were here around 7:30 p.m. Earl said he had one more scare to do, so I went inside to watch TV. I lost track of time.”

“We’re taking the body now.”

The police officer and Linda watched them lift the body into the ambulance.

Suddenly, Earl sat up, his eyes glowing red.

Everyone screamed.

James Rumpel writes sci-fi, fantasy, and horror. His wife writes to-do lists.



Satiated

by Laura Nettles

Nectar glides over delicate tongues, guzzling down furry throats. Flowers wilt, their liquors depleted. Leather wings flap as the bats pull away. Full, but not satiated.

Fruit is decimated, thousands of bat bites causing pulp to fly. Orchards are demolished in the wake of the bat colony. They move on. Bloated, but not satiated.

Cows cry, groaning as their knees buckle. Herds drop in droves, fields dappling with bloodless rotting carcasses. The bats fly on, stomachs distending, but not satiated.

Trick-or-treaters scream, scattering when the swollen bats descend. Candy flies all directions, blood spraying sugar crimson. Bats explode, finally satiated.

Laura Nettles pens terror by moonlight in Toronto, Canada. Follow her journey at lauranettles.com.



Float

by Chelsea Pumpkins

I t's a lovely night for a float on the river, don't you think? The cover of night, bullfrogs crooning. Just you and me.

I gently lower you into the cool water. We don't make a splash, don't make a sound. Our secret rendezvous bubbles in my chest, to my throat. I cover my giggle with your hand.

Wading in behind you, I hold your waist against the current. I press my lips to yours and cherish our last moment together.

Then I let you go.

Your pale skin glows in the starlight as you float, facedown, towards your ever after.

Read Chelsea Pumpkins' stories in anthologies Chromophobia and Bloodless, and follow her on Twitter [@ChelseaPumpkins](https://twitter.com/ChelseaPumpkins).



Search Party by Tom Trussel

Another little group of hikers has gone missing in the forest. City folks failing the easiest challenge nature can present; follow the path to the rented cabin. The woods can be dangerous after dark. Us locals volunteer for search parties, again.

We walk line abreast, methodically searching. Our dogs rummage for scent between dancing pools of stark flashlight. Can we locate them in time?

A few miles in, the dogs mark the spoor, excited. We find the lost hikers. Cold and hungry, but relieved.

With our sacrifice in hand, the ritual can commence.

We'll just say we never found them.

Tom Trussel lives in Norway with his family and assorted snow shovels. Read his stories:
TomTrussel.com



Firefly Jack-o'-Lanterns

by Laura Nettles

Fireflies dance through the openings carved in pumpkin flesh, illuminating the interiors with bioluminescence. Their spindle legs clutch candy stolen from the trick-o'-treaters, having left burning welts as compensation.

Sugar bubbles and melts in their clasp, dripping down into the orange interior of the gourd, cooking it. Sweet odours fill the air, beckoning the ravenous children of the street.

Little hands reach inside the jack-o'-lanterns, fishing for roasted food. They jerk back, not fast enough, fingers roasted and nibbled to bone. Blood freely flows down their palms, nectar for the fireflies.

Tiny tongues lap at the crimson. Lightning glows red.

Laura Nettles pens terror by moonlight in Toronto, Canada. Follow her journey at lauranettles.com.



Drunkard Fools by S. Jade Path

The whole town was on edge. Cattle found ripped apart and drained of blood. People went missing, mostly those caught out at night—drunkards and fools. Everyone knew what these things signified; knew what monster roamed the streets.

The pub was full of townsfolk's frightened whispers.

“The Dip is an old wives’ tale!” Marc slurred, turning unsteadily to leave.

Too drunk to hear the low growls as he stumbled through the alley or hear the limping gait of canid nails. Too drunk to scream.

The weight of the creature bore him down.

He felt the fangs sink into his veins.

S. Jade Path has a penchant for strolling amongst demons and forging shadows into fiction.
linktr.ee/SJadePath



My Monster

by L.E. Wraith

We walk door to door, asking strangers for candy. She holds my hand, guiding me across asphalt streets and up porch steps. For those passing us, we look like a normal pairing: a mother and daughter out on Halloween night.

But they don't see the bruise on my arms, covered by a mummy's costume. They don't see the hesitant glances I slide towards Mother before answering questions from the parents of the other creatures, Disney princesses, and fairies. They don't know that when I return home, I don't enjoy my candy because Mother removes her mask and becomes my monster.

L.E. Wraith is a nineteenth century Gothic trapped in the twenty-first century. For more:
lewraith.com.



Miser

by Rachel L. Tilley

Every year, I sequester myself away; ignoring knocks at my door. The tapping of the children running back and forth gets my hackles up, but they don't egg my house. They wouldn't dare.

This year I'm waiting, but no one comes. 2 a.m...3 a.m...silence.

I peel back a curtain and peek outside; there's only darkness.

I turn on the porch light, and only then do I see the crowds waiting, gathered across my lawn. They're mindless—possessed? Yet on seeing me, they come to life—a half-life. There's only one thing occupying their thoughts—retribution.

I am forsaken.

Rachel L. Tilley writes short stories in the fantasy and horror genres. [@rachelltilley](https://twitter.com/rachelltilley)



The Seeker

by Andy Clark

The boy skipped from porch to porch, leaping between the houses, twisting and twirling in the air, scanning the dark night, like a blood-filled tumbleweed in a suburban desert. His feet landed sure, and on each landing the child hesitated, searching for treasure. Yet no chocolate or taffy for this Halloween pilgrim, nor did plastic skeletons or fake witches hold his attention. It was the pumpkins he fixed upon, inspecting each intently, seeking the one that would fill his needs, the one with fiery eyes and cutting teeth, the one the boy would put on his shoulders as his head.

Andy Clark lives in Richmond with his wife, son, grand-dachshund and is a moderator for fantasy-writers.org.



Dangerous Waters

by Lori Green

Selena waited just below the surface as the setting sun cast its faded light over the sea. She hummed softly, sending out ethereal vibrations that reached around like tentacles, drawing the boat closer. Even from here, she could smell their putrid breath, rank with beer and cigarettes. Fishing in *her* spot, without so much as an offering. She flipped her tail in anger, the ripples rising upwards.

“There!” one of them cried. “Cast your line over there!”

A silver hook appeared, and Selena grinned. She gave it a gentle tug before she pulled the man overboard and swallowed him whole.

Lori Green is a horror writer walking the fine line between macabre and madness. Twitter:
[@LoriG1408](https://twitter.com/LoriG1408)



Bobbing Apples by Garrison McKnight

“Put your head in the water, and the first one to grab an apple, wins!” Bobby snickered.

Jeff didn’t trust him much. These guys were older.

Jeff’s face hovered over the water bowl, calculating how to get an apple. He decided he could push the fruit to the bottom of the barrel and then bite into it.

And that’s what he did.

He felt the hand on the back of his head, keeping him underwater. Jeff struggled, hearing their water-muffled laughter.

Suddenly, fangs grew, and gill slits opened on the sides of his neck—his outfit wasn’t just a costume.

Garrison McKnight is merely a figment of the imagination.



Ghost-Knocking

by Rebecca Cuthbert

Colin was elected to do the knocking.

“Sorry, mate,” said Nathan. “Majority rules.”

The game was simple. Halloween night, go to their victim’s house. Creep round it, knocking first on one side, then the other. Tap a stick against the windows. Lob rocks onto the roof.

Run away.

They couldn’t have known their teacher’s old mum was home alone. That she’d be so scared she’d leave her bed, hurry down the stairs, lose her footing, bash her head.

IT WAS THE NEXT NIGHT—EACH lad home, almost asleep—when the knocking started.

It’s never stopped.

They lie awake and tremble.

Rebecca Cuthbert writes speculative, slipstream, and dark fiction and poetry. Publications and more at rebeccacuthbert.com.



Dry Leaves

by John A. McColley

The leaves whisper as they scratch and slide across the road... You're told it's the wind, but fallen leaves are harbingers, corpses hovering and dancing at death's border. They bear warning colours. When they speak, we need to listen.

When winter stalks, it knows its bounds by where the leaves are still the colours of fire. It is an ancient pact, one which might just keep us safe if we paint our houses yellow, red, and orange. If we fail to heed the old ways, if the paint fades and peels too much, the cold will march right through us.

John A. McColley writes from his cave in New England. Come visit him at

www.patreon.com/JohnAMcColley



Healthy Skin by Gabriella Balcom

Lorelei leaned back, sighing. The hot liquid she'd prepared for her bath lapped at her body. Luxuriating, she took a deep breath, inhaling the rich scent. She cupped her hand, scooped up fluid and sipped.

The blood hit her tongue, and she shivered at the deliciousness of it. The full moon of All Saints' Eve made it especially potent, and her fangs immediately descended.

In addition to blood being the mainstay of Lorelei's diet, she regularly drained it from certain victims, the tastier ones, so she could bathe in it.

After all, caring for her skin was important, wasn't it?

Gabriella Balcom writes fantasy, horror, romance, and sci-fi, and has 347 works accepted for publication. Facebook: [@GabriellaBalcom.lonestarauthor](https://www.facebook.com/GabriellaBalcom.lonestarauthor)



Sleep Walking by Dawn DeBaal

Sophie was drunk, so we left her behind at the Halloween party. No one wanted her spewing in the car.

“We shouldn’t have left her. How will she get home?” I lamented.

“She’s a puker,” Andy shot back. “I don’t care.”

Andy dropped us off at our homes, safe and sound.

When the morning paper hit the porch, Sophie’s picture was on the front page, with the headline that read “Teenager Killed by Drunk Driver.”

It seems Andy felt guilty and went back for Sophie, who was walking down the side of the road.

He’d fallen asleep at the wheel.

Dawn DeBaal has over 500 published pieces to her credit and still wants more!
linktr.ee/dawndebral



Loving Bones by Josh Clark

Kids screamed as I placed my bony fingers upon one of their shoulders. His arm smacked my skull, skewing it, as his crew stampeded out the door and down the stairs.

Bones creaked as I righted my head back to the proper position atop my spine.

Always screams, as kids entered my home every October. I only wanted to spend time with them and reach out an inviting hand.

My skin had rotted away, but I possessed as calm a demeanour as ever. They were all so afraid, but we'd make the best of friends, were I given a chance.

Josh Clark is a writer, bookseller, and graphic designer from Denver, Colorado. Twitter : [@joshofclark](https://twitter.com/joshofclark)



Noise Complaint by Corinne Pollard

The spider sprawled on the coffee table, eyes wide, legs outstretched, cobwebs loosened, soaking in a thickening pool of blood. Her sugar-rush shrieks were gone.

The clown bent over the armchair, his make-up smudged, no longer grinning. He had dashed, but with his enormous feet, he easily tripped. His nose rolled under the doorway, splattering crimson upon the carpet. His squeaky toys and booming chortles died.

The speakers were last. They crackled a line “it was a graveyard smash” before fading.

I sighed and rested my gun. My ears danced in the brief stillness before screams and police sirens interrupted

Corinne is a UK disabled horror writer published in Sirens Call and Trembling with Fear. Twitter: [@CorinnePWriter](https://twitter.com/CorinnePWriter)



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And to you, our discerning reader, we and these talented writers did it all for you. We hope you enjoyed the tales, and if you did, don't forget to leave a review.

Thank you all—see you next time.

Love & kisses

The Black Hare Press Team



About the Publisher

B LACK HARE PRESS is a small, independent publisher based in Melbourne, Australia.

Founded in 2018, our aim has always been to champion emerging authors from all around the globe and offer opportunities for them to participate in speculative fiction and horror short story anthologies.

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